

You Can Be Strong Enough



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YOU CAN BE STRONG ENOUGH

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9; John 7:46, 10:10; Luke 17:21

On a balmy September night back in 1925 a young man walked alone into a grassy meadow, not far from the sea, on Long Island. In his hand he held a bottle on which was the label POISON. He raised his eyes to the heavens and took one long, last look at the infinite depths of the sky. He looked out to sea and saw a long shaft of silvery light from a full moon lying like molten silver on the rippling water. The thought crossed his mind that it was a beautiful world and that he loved it.

But life had hit him many blows. He was reeling under them. He felt that he couldn't take it any more. It was too much for him. Overwhelming, overpowering weakness and an abysmal blackness had settled on his mind. He took one quick drink of the bottle and fell to the earth.

Presently he awoke. Bright sunlight was all around. He turned his eyes to where in the distance he could see the ocean. It was sparkling, like the dancing of myriads of diamonds. In his bewilderment the man asked aloud, "Lord, am I in heaven? Or," he added dubiously, "am I on earth?" He put his hand down - and felt the solid, substantial soil of Long Island. Then it swept over him that he hadn't even been able to kill himself. He who had failed at everything else had blundered at this too. And

he cried to the Lord, "Lord, why am I so weak that I can't even take my own poor, worthless life?"

Then he heard a Voice. And the Voice said to him, "I don't want you to die. I want you to live, for I have something that I want you to do."

"But," he implored, "Lord, pity me. I'm so terribly weak. I just can't do anything."

Then he heard the Lord speak (his old Sunday School memories coming up out of the past with some thing very wonderful from the Bible that nobody ought ever to forget), saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And he seemed to hear the Lord tell him, "Harry, you have missed the way of life. Go out and give of yourself and of your substance to others and you will have a wonderful life."

Harry and I later on were good friends for many years. He became an outstandingly happy person, and would say that few men I've known have done more good for more people. Out of every dollar he earned he gave almost half away. And somehow the more he gave, the more he earned and was able to give. His giving printed a continuous flow of plenty.

He developed into a practical hard-headed business man. He could drive a bargain; he could do a job. On the other hand, he had a philosophical message printed on the reverse side of his business card. This stamped him as somewhat of a character, no doubt; but sometimes I think we need more such "characters." Why should we be standardized people, all behaving alike as though we were afraid to be "different?" The people who accomplish "most are almost all "characters" in the sense that they aren't afraid to be themselves. This country was made great by characters. Ben Franklin was a character. Walt

Whitman was a character. Henry Ford was a character. They might all be called creative characters. I think I'll preach a sermon some day on creative characters.

Well the front side of Harry's business card gave his name, company, address and telephone number, all in the usual way. But on the other side was this philosophical message. He would hand this card out every where. People reading this message on it must often have thought him a bit odd; but the better they got to know him, the more they knew that this man had something worth while. This is what it said on the back of his card:

"The Way to Happiness. Keep your heart free of hate. Keep your mind from worry. Live simply, expect little, give much. Fill your life with love. Scatter sunshine. Forget self, think of others. Do as you would be done by. Try this for a week and you will be surprised."

This man had harmonized himself with a wonderful law, a law of happiness, a law of achievement, a law of creativity. That law can be expressed in one short sentence: Give of yourself and of your substance. So Harry's weakness passed away. It became strength. His defeat passed away. It became victory. His unhappiness passed away. It became wondrous joy.

Many years after he and I first met I went to see Harry when he was on his deathbed. As I walked into the room he, greeted me with the words, "Norman, I'm glad to see you, for I am going to die. I'm going to be with the kind and wonderful Heavenly Father Jesus and with many loved ones." His face was alight as though he might be telling me he was going to Europe or somewhere else for a wonderful vacation.

And I said, "I'm sorry."

"Oh," he said, "don't be sorry, don't be sorry. I've had

a wonderful time with God here on earth. I expect to Christian. They had filled it full of little "don'ts." Don't have a wonderful time with God in heaven." do this, don't do this, don't do this. Don't play cards, That is what I call living, friends, and that is what don't dance, and so forth. And, inasmuch as I did some I call dying. That is life majestic. That is the story of those things, I developed a sense of guilt and it took how a defeated, mixed-up, unhappy, conflicted person me years to get released from it. ality got filled full of the power because he learned to Then along came some wiseacres of a later generation live in harmony with the law of giving, service, love. who threw that idea of Christianity out, saying, Now this is what Christianity teaches. You know, Chris this at all" - but only to substitute an equally un- tianity is much more wonderful than the average person's balanced conception of their own. They saw it as being imagines it to be. It couldn't have lasted as it has for nearly merely - or mainly - a system of social ethics. And two thousand years unless it was alive and vital and work if you didn't go along with them you were in their es derful. I know that some of the so-called Christianity we see is a reactiona reactionary. Consequently, thousands upon makes a person wonder how in the world it survives at all thousands of men and women left off being active mem - so dull, dour, uninteresting does it seem, with no vitality bers of churches. There ensued a terrible deterioration to it. Christianity is essentially is in a deestablished of moral standards in this country, and I lay this at the by a Man who was absolutely uncomplicated. He went door of people who didn't have the slightest idea of the among simple people and He taught them simple laws magnitude of what Jesus Christ was trying to do for And they marveled. People said, "Never man spake like rankind. Jesus was trying to help people see that they this man." He taught a way of life was his wonderful could live above all difficulties and all weaknesses, with and at the same time workable. glorious victory in their hearts. And this takes them out on the world to change it. The world will never be changed without changed people. People small in outlook and understanding have taken the Christian faith and built into it here a system of theology, here a system of sacerdotal worship and here Christianity's based on law. This is a law-abiding a system of philosophy and made it so complicated that universe. There are laws of dynamics, there are laws of it no longer interests many people. Its influence declined nuclear physics, there are all kinds of laws. Christianity because it didn't talk the language of the people. is likewise based on law - spiritual law. The Bible is a seen this in my own lifetime. Certain people will develop law book. It is filled with techniques and formulas which their own conception of Christianity and they'll maintain, are workable because they are based on law. But Chris "This is it. If you don't go along with these rules you're not a Christian." Christianity is seldom presented in this light. It is presented in not a Christian." When was a boy, for example, all a fuzzy way. Now the central law in Christianity is a around me were people sincerely being godly law of giving. God gave His only Son, that through people, but who - in my judgment, as I see it now - Him we might have eternal life. And He tells us that had a very small conception of what it means to be if we want life eternal and life now we must give. If

you hang onto your life, hold it to yourself, save it all you can, then you lose your life. But if you give generously of yourself and of your substance, then life comes back to you. It is the law of abundance.

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Do you know the meaning of the word abundance? I didn't, until I looked it up a day or two ago. And I was thrilled. The derivation of the word abundance goes back to the Latin verb *undare*, which means "to rise up in waves." Isn't that great? Life rises up in waves. Have you got any waves of life? Or are you living on little dribbles? mighty God is a generous God. He never meant that we should dribble through life. He intended us to live in abundance.

Of all handicaps that hold people back from being successful in their living and from overcoming weakness and having strength, the worst is a lack of love. There is no wisdom like that of the Bible, which tells us not to be angry with people and not to hate them, but to love them; not to be irritable with people, but love and serve them. If you so live, life will flow back to you in great waves.

I received a letter from a young man by the name of Floyd. He worked for an organization with headquarters in Washington known as the Hot Shoppes. These Hot Shoppes started from one little hamburger place. But from that small beginning has developed a whole chain of restaurants and motels, food service to hospitals and love lines and what have you. The Hot Shoppes are run by a man who is a member of the Mormon Church, a man who believes that if you apply your Christian principles in your business your business will succeed and will do good.

Well, this fellow Floyd worked for the Hot Shoppes. But he had a temper. He served at one of these outdoor drive-in places. If someone failed to tip him, or gave him a tip that he didn't think was big enough, he would "let 'em have it." "I told 'em," he'd say afterwards. "Isn't this pathetic?" "I told 'em."

So after a while somebody told him something. And what he was told was, "You're fired!" Seven times he was fired by the Hot Shoppes. Any other company would have fired him once and that would have been it. But these people had the Christian spirit and seven times they gave him another chance. Finally, after the seventh time, the manager called him in and told him, "Floyd, you're fired and this is for keeps. What's the matter with you? You always have a chip on your shoulder. You're ill tempered. You're rude. Get next to yourself, son," he said. "There's good in you." And he told Floyd where he'd better go to get help for making something of himself: to the Lord.

Well, the next Sunday Floyd started going to church. He went to a big, swanky church. You find them everywhere. And there he heard a sermon on the infusion of social ethics into the labor situation. Naturally, this left Floyd cold. What he wanted was something to change his life.

But fortunately he didn't give up. And he finally found a little church, a simple church, where the minister and the members loved Jesus and knew that this man was sick. These people led him to the Great Physician. And He took the hate out of Floyd's heart and filled him with love and the spirit of service. His friends at the church then said to him, "Now the thing for you to do is go back to the Hot Shoppes and tell them that you're a different Floyd and you want a job."

He went back to the Hot Shoppes. They saw that he was a different man. They gave him a job. And someone at the church said to him, "You know, whatever you earn each week you should figure out what one tenth of it is and bring one tenth here and give it to the Lord." This was wise advice.

Floyd wasn't too sure he liked it much at first, but the more he followed it the more he had. He found that life is abundant. "My weaknesses were healed," he says, "as I gave of myself and of my substance."

Y-you know over the Bible there could be written this phrase: "This is a book of law." And it always works. You give up your hates, you give up your anger, you give up your selfishness, you let yourself go and give - and life will flow to you in waves of abundance.

One more example, and with this I'll conclude: A friend of mine by the name of Spratt is a businessman in Missouri, with business that extends throughout that part of the country. And Mr. Spratt believes that all weakness, all sin, all failure, can be overcome by putting into practice simple laws taught by Jesus. He had a sales man by the name of Joe who was failing - couldn't seem to deliver. So one day he called him, in and said, "Joe, give me your order book."

"Are you discharging me, Mr. Spratt?"

"No, I'm not discharging you. I'm going to re-charge you. Now I want you to go the rounds this week as usual and call on all your customers and prospects without an order book. If anybody offers you an order, decline it. Say you're not working this week. Just visit with your customers. Get to know them, their wives and kids, try to see what their needs are, their human needs. Love them. Pray for them. If there's anything

helpful you can do for them, do it."

The first place Joe called, the man was busy. "Jim," said Joe, "can I come back of the counter and give you a hand?"

"Why?" asked the other. "Aren't you doing anything?"

"No, I'm taking a week off."

"Well, all right," said Jim. And Joe helped him all day.

The next man Joe called was a mean sort of a fellow. But Joe hung around so long that finally the man asked, "Joe, will you come home with me for dinner?"

"I'll call Mary. I'm sure she'll think it's great for you to have dinner with us."

Joe, sitting there, could hear the phone conversation, and it didn't sound as though Mary was exactly enthusiastic. But he did go to the man's home for dinner.

And the two little boys pleaded, "Daddy, play ball with us."

But their daddy said, "No, I'm too busy. I had a hard day." So Joe played ball with the boys until darkness fell.

Then he sat with them and told them stories until finally their mother put them to bed. And he warmed the whole family up with good feeling. And ever after that the boys called him "Uncle Joe."

The next evening he called at a place where the man was painting his house. He said, "Give me some overalls." And he helped paint the house. Never a word about an order; not a thing about business. Just helped the man and learned to love him.

And what do you suppose happened the next time Joe went out with his order book. You can imagine. Joe went to Mr. Spratt and he said, "I don't understand this. Where did you get these ideas?"

"Joe, this is in the teaching of Jesus. This is the law

of human relationships."

You don't need to be weak, nor defeated, nor poverty stricken, nor bogged down in difficulty. Here is a wonderful law through which by the grace of Jesus Christ you can overcome your weakness and have strength. Life in Christ has an enormous flow to it. But the flow must be activated out from your own life. You have to stimulate the flow, and the flow then lifts you from level to level. You can be strong as you learn the secret of the outflowing personality that brings life flowing back in waves of abundance.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for these simple, yet powerful laws that lie embedded in the wisdom of the New Testament, by which we can overcome our weaknesses, our defeats, our poverty, our failures, and live with greatness and in abundance. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.