

approval? How long has it been since you walked to the altar of some Christian church and repented of your wayward living and made peace with God? Too long? Oh, yes, for most of us it has been far too long. Little wonder we are spiritually impoverished and wondering why we are cracking up and breaking down!

When you pause, it will give you time to count your blessings one by one. Until one stops, he never really knows how well off he is. The foolish pace drives him in a mania for more inasmuch that he really doesn't know what wealth is his already. Such a wholesome pause will do away with the necessity of counting sheep while trying to go to sleep. He can count his blessings instead.

#### POWER OF PAUSING

Moreover, when one learns the power of pausing, he will have time to know that all of Christ's commands were not: "Arise and shine." Part of them sound like the consoling voice of a mother to a sick child, "Lie down, my son, and rest." No, God doesn't always say, "Get up and go." Instead, there are times when He leads us beside the still waters into green pastures and makes us lie down. He knows that unless we come apart from the noisy world, we shall come apart inside.

Let it be understood right here that for a Christian (or any other person for that matter) the choice isn't between burning out or rusting out; it is not a choice between complete activity and complete inactivity. Complete activity will burn one out indeed, but complete inactivity would be a worse fate. Wisdom consists in being

able to burn with incandescent zeal at times, then alternately to glow in minimum zeal at other times. Here a sense of timing and proportion becomes not only valuable but also absolutely essential to right living.

Jesus told his early apostles to come out to a desert place. He did not ask them to come to the noisy island or circus centers, nor to the commercial bazaars or their equivalent in His day where human nature has a way of wadding up to excite the baser elements of human nature. There is nothing about the average amusement place where the soul can catch up with the body. As a matter of fact, most people leave their souls back home when they plan a vacation jaunt because a vacation to many is also a vacation from morals and discrete spiritual sensitivity. But in a desert place, (that is, some non-commercialized, quiet retreat where one can hear the symphony of silence), the ragged nerves and jaded dispositions can ooze into a more livable condition. The power of pause is powerful indeed in such environment.

Note that Jesus told them, "Come ye," not "Go ye," which implies a coming to Him. In effect He says, "Come with Me." My, what an invitation—to walk one's weary feet in cadence with Christ, to stop beside the babbling brook and hear Him speak, "Be not dismayed for I am thy God." Oh, friends, the pause that refreshes is not necessarily just a carbonated drink. It is the presence of Almighty God who can invade our lives to bless, guide, sustain, and direct us away from that which would destroy us.

## LIFE'S BIGGEST MISTAKES

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Life's biggest mistakes usually are not matters of strategy nor political choices but are personal and interpersonal choices. The choice of the wrong partner for business or for one's home, the decision to take the wrong road: these constitute our major mistakes. Of course, it is easier to speak from hindsight than from foresight; it is equally true that we all make mistakes,

even the best of men. Today it is my purpose in this sermon to point out four of the biggest mistakes any person ever makes. Will you hear them?

#### USELESS WORRY

One of them is the tendency to worry over things that cannot be changed. Before these are listed, we should be eager to con-

clude that there are many things that drag life down which can be changed. It is too easy to pronounce the words, *can't*, *impossible*, *no*, etc. The records are replete with dams that have been built, deserts irrigated, malarial lowlands drained, diseases conquered, inventions given the world, invisible continents charted—which once defied imagination. These were one day considered impossible. As a matter of fact, nearly every worthwhile stride forward in human progress was at one time or another considered outside the realm of achievement. Every Christian's philosophy should be interwoven with the motto of those combat engineers, "The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer."

There are many things that can be changed in our world right now if enough intelligent people dedicated their efforts to the task. But the individual is too much like the small boy who kept getting in his dad's way. Finally, the dad took the boy out in the field, gathered a pile of small stones, and told the son to throw them in a ditch at a target while the father worked the field. Hardly had the father gone back to his plowing before the lad came once again to him and said, "Daddy, I have thrown all the rocks in the ditch but one, and it is too heavy for me to lift. I have tried with all my might, but I can't lift that one." Said the father, "But what you didn't remember is that my strength is a part of your might. The two of us can lift it together." Just so with God and our dedication. The boulders of life can't be moved by human sufficiency, but God and one man still equal sufficient strength to change that which needs changing.

But it is a mistake indeed to believe that one man or any number of men can move Gibraltar. There are some things in life which cannot be changed. A leopard cannot change its spots; a man cannot change the color of his skin; no one can change the seasons or the weather. There are types of sickness over which all medicines and medics have little or no effect. And to sit down and worry over these is indeed one of life's biggest mistakes. Alexander the Great worried over the fact that ivy would not grow in Babylon. Many a couple is worrying themselves

into mental illness over the fact that they cannot have children; others over the fact that they cannot have a fortune. And so it goes.

#### ART OF ACCEPTANCE

Yet, many ask, "Preacher, but what do we do when we come up against these mountainous circumstances that cannot be changed?" What must one do? He must learn the gracious art of acceptance, the ability to adapt himself to his circumstances. This doesn't imply a blind fatalism; it is not the way to hang one's head and say, "This is my hard lot in life, and I can't do anything about it." Instead, he says, "This is my lot; I shall convert a stumbling block into a stepping stone, and by the grace of God I shall convert my jungle into a rose garden." A constant aggravation of one's thorn means nothing more than continual festering and pain. Gracious acceptance means to read a providential purpose in the unchangeable, to ask why is it unchangeable in the first place. The answer may be embarrassingly specific—it is the doings of God!

Do what Edna Gladney did when she found that she could not have a child. After years of frantic worrying she finally accepted her lot as a barren woman. But she did something else. She founded an orphanage for barren children, for those who had no parents at all. Thereby she became mother to scores of them. That's the way to irrigate a dry desert of unchangeable circumstances.

#### WRONG PRIORITIES

Another major mistake of life is refusing to set aside little preferences in order that important things may be accomplished. Most of the failures result not from missing some great opportunity but from missing out on doing the common chores at the right time. Life is dogged from day till night by the little vixen who destroy the tender vines. Most of our year's mileage is but the accumulation of efforts spent on trivial issues and spurline values. What a day of awakening comes when we learn to set aside our little personal preferences in order that something truly important might be done.

Every person's job is about 85 per cent routine with the rest of it representing a few high moments and elative experiences. But the vast majority is the constant plugging which is as essential as the other. Work is to be done regardless of mood or mind, and refusing to set aside some trivial preference stands in the way of many who otherwise would accomplish much. A military man isn't asked whether or not he will take an assignment. His orders are typed out and handed to him. Much of the same is involved in the life of a Christian. Perhaps nothing in the church so explains the lack of intelligent direction to our efforts as an unwilling, argumentative disobedience to follow Divine orders which have been handed to each of us. In a very definite sense, ours is the confession of the Light Brigade: "Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die."

#### CRUSHING OTHERS

Now we come to a third mistake—one so major that it is nigh universal in prevalence—namely, the delusion that individual advancement can be made by crushing others down. It cannot for long! Climbing the ladder of success on the backs of one's fellow man is a shoddy ladder which will not support one all the way to the top. As a matter of fact, that kind of top isn't worth ascending at all. It is an infamous bit of conviction among many people that the survival of the fittest gives them the freedom to say who the fittest are. Usually they mean only themselves. The easiest word in any language to pronounce is "I." The hardest is "you." But Jesus came to endorse that difficulty, to get every man to see every other man and thereby make life worth living.

The cave man still survives today. In business it is seen everywhere. The golden rule is reduced to the brass rule where anything goes just so long as it makes a profit. If it makes money, it is considered "good business." Human life can be ground down or reduced to penury in the

<sup>1</sup>Alfred Tennyson; *Best Loved Poems of the American People*; p 440; Hazel Felleman; Garden City Publishing Co.; Garden City, New York; 1936.

process. What cares those who are madened by this delusion? On an international basis it is exemplified in the great Krupp cartels, that German monopoly was equally willing to finance education or Hitler's war machine—either, just so long as the end product was more profit. It is seen on a local level where one individual in his work schemes to get ahead regardless of the consequences to another individual. It is seen when mortgages are foreclosed unduly, when in local, petty politics (whether state or church) when personal advancement is the issue.

Tragically, it is seen in religion where in honor one does not prefer another to himself: where laymen and often ministers jockey for preferential seats and honors of distinction; where Diotrophes still loves to have pre-eminence among the brethren. Some church leaders are perennial candidates for all the denominational offices but are general flunkies when it comes to doing the common work so akin to the genius of Christian faith. Such a predicament completely eclipses what was said about the suffering Servant, "And He made of Himself no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men." No reputation; no worldly prestige was His goal, and it is a mistake of greatest magnitude to believe that the servants of this Master should be deluded by thinking that individual advancement can be had at the expense of anyone.

#### THE BIGGEST MISTAKE

The other mistake that I mention is the biggest of the four: the delusion that victorious living is possible without God. Many men have tried it without success. Life was made by God for God, and any other conclusion merely compounds the failure.

Said Sir William Osler, internationally renowned doctor, "I searched through physics, science, psychology, medicine, chemistry, and the arts for God but without success." Then one day he walked beside a little brook, felt the soothing balm of eventide, and a still small voice within him asked, "God?" His heart replied, "Yes." That day this great man entered in his journal the following, "This day I began to live."