

More Like Jesus

David Brandt Berg



MORE LIKE JESUS

David Brandt Berg

A Mountain Streams Book

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CONTENTS

Introduction	v
Flesh or Spirit?	1
Hallelujah for Happiness!.....	11
Be So Happy!.....	15
Lovelight.....	23
Squeeze!—Don't Jerk!	27
Go Slow—You'll Get There Quicker	33
Holy Holes	37
Count Your Blessings.....	43
Praise Power	49
"My Yoke Is Easy"	55
The Oil Lamp	61
"Be Faithful Until Death"	65
Afterword	71
About the Author	72

INTRODUCTION

What is it about some Christians? Why do they seem to radiate more of the Lord's love than others? What gives them their quiet confidence in the face of obstacles and adversity? Why do they seem happier, more victorious? Where do they get their conviction, strong faith, and outgoing concern for others? In short, what makes them *more like Jesus*?

In this series of articles, David Brandt Berg explains that becoming more like Jesus isn't a matter of self-works, self-deprivation, or striving in ourselves to be super-righteous. It's simply a matter of learning to love and enjoy the Lord and all He has to offer, and then following Him as best we can.

Jesus wants us to be happy (John 15:11; Psalm 144:15). He came to earth and died so that we could be reconciled with God, and thereby live happily with Him in Heaven forever. But that's not the only reason He came, and that's not all He has for us. He also wants to teach us how to experience much of that heavenly happiness here and now, and He wants us to show others how happy they can be by believing in Him, receiving His love, and following His loving example. *More Like Jesus* will help you do just that.

Flesh or Spirit?

The most raging religious controversy the world has ever known has been between the do-it-yourself religions and the God-alone-can-save-you kind. Man has always been trying to save himself, to work his way to Heaven, with just a little help from God thrown in. That way he can give himself most of the credit and go his own way.

The first murder was committed by a religionist of the do-it-yourself kind, Cain (the oldest son of the first couple, Adam and Eve). Cain killed his brother Abel,¹ a man who was trusting God. This was the beginning of the persecution of the true church by the false church. Cain was religious, very religious. He was trying very hard to save himself in his own way, even sacrificing to God and claiming to worship God. He was doing his best to ask God to help him earn his own salvation—but his best wasn't good enough! His way was not *God's* way, but was the way of all false religions.

¹ Genesis chapter 4

Those who follow false religions are all dependent upon self-righteousness and their own way. Most of them claim to be worshipping God and seeking a little help from Him to make it, but because they work so hard at trying to earn it, they figure they deserve it—with or without His help—and are quite offended if He doesn't seem to appreciate their goodness. They say, "Why, look at all we've done for You, God! You ought to give us a medal! We really *deserve* to be saved! If You're ever going to save anybody, You should save *us*! If anybody's going to make it to Heaven, *we* should certainly make it!"

On the other hand, Abel just did what God told him to do—and he "offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain":¹ the sacrifice of pure faith in what God told him to do. By sacrificing a lamb, which was a foreshadowing of Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of the world,² Abel showed that he was trusting God alone to save him. He knew he had only God's righteousness, and none of his own, and that salvation was purely a gift from God.³

Abel's humble sacrifice made such a fool out of the hard-working Cain, the self-made man and devout religionist, devoted to his own form of worship, and it so totally exposed the futility and hypocrisy of Cain's hard work, that Cain was furious. After all his labors of the flesh, his legalistic reasoning,

¹ Hebrews 11:4

³ Ephesians 2:8–9

² John 1:29

and his demands for salvation in return for all he was doing, Cain was so humiliated that he tried to wipe out the awful truth that his religion had failed to save him—and he did so by killing the man whose simple faith in God’s grace had exposed him.

Thus began the battle royal between pride and humility, between the damned religionists and the saved sinners—the perpetual warfare that has been waged ever since between the false church and the true church, flesh and spirit, works and faith, law and grace, self and God.

This conflict has resulted in some of the greatest misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Scriptures that have ever existed. Most people have been trying to save themselves ever since, with as little thanks to God as possible, and they have twisted the Scriptures to try to prove they could do it! But God can’t help them to save themselves. He does not help those who think they can help themselves, but only those who know they can’t. They can’t save themselves, no matter how much they try to get His help to do it their way.

The religionists of ancient times wound up serving their do-it-yourself religions instead of God, and were destroyed in the flood of His judgments—and Noah and his family alone were saved by the grace of God in the ark. The very waters that destroyed the wicked, unbelieving world delivered the trusting believers.¹

¹ Genesis chapters 6–8

But still the works religionists didn't learn. As the German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770–1831) observed, the only thing we ever learn from history is that we *never* learn from history. They were soon at it again, this time building themselves a tower to try to get to Heaven by their own works, to try to make a name for themselves and take credit for their greatness. But that didn't work either. It only resulted in Babel, or total confusion, and we've been suffering from this confusion, this babbling of many languages, ever since.¹

Even the patriarch Abraham tried to pull a few tricks to save himself and his posterity, until God had to show him that it was all by faith and the miracle-working power of God, not by his own efforts.²

When Moses tried to liberate the Hebrews his way, he fell flat on his face before God in the desert when he found out he couldn't make it on his own.

The children of Israel tried to win battles their way, and were defeated many times when they thought they could save themselves by their military might. Even Samson discovered that he was a weakling without the power of God.

Kings Saul, David, and Solomon all found that they only made fools of themselves whenever they tried to go it on their own. They all learned that only God could save them.

¹ Genesis 11:1–9

² Genesis 20

This “grace versus works” debate was the biggest cause of division amongst the early Christians. Could one simply believe and be saved, or was it necessary to also keep some of the hundreds of Jewish religious laws? The Jewish Christians just couldn’t help but believe that Jews were a little bit better than Gentiles, even amongst Christians. “Sure, we believe that Jesus is the Messiah,” they said, “but we still have to help Him save us by keeping the Mosaic Law.” This obnoxious mixture of works and grace so nauseated the apostle Paul that he publicly bawled out Peter for it and spent years fighting it in epistle after epistle.¹

As a young Christian, I too was deceived for a time by the delusive doctrine of off-again, on-again, gone-again eternal *insecurity* taught by some churches and “works” religions. But then one day as a teenager, I was thrilled to discover the simple truth of John 3:36. After years of discouragement and defeat and lack of assurance of my own salvation, I found that all I had to do was *believe*. That was enough! Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son *has* everlasting life”—right now! No ifs, ands, or buts about it! No “providing you’re a good boy or girl and go to church every Sunday,” and none of this “sinless perfection” business.

I just hadn’t been able to make it on my own, and I knew it. It seemed that the harder I tried to be good, the worse I got! As the apostle Paul lamented,

¹ Galatians 2:11–21

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”¹

That was all there was to it. There was nothing else, no other way, no righteousness of my own, none of my own good works. None of these could keep me saved any more than they could save me in the first place! Only Jesus could do it! Not only had *He* needed to save me, but He also had to do the good works through me. It was *all* Jesus, and nothing of myself or my own goodness or self-righteousness—just Jesus. I was so relieved to learn that, as I knew I could never make it otherwise. It had to be God. I just couldn't do it—so *He* did!

The trouble with many Christians today is that they're still living in the Old Testament. Their Christianity is a *works* religion. Years ago I remember hearing about some missionaries who had gone to Japan. Upon arrival they were asked by the local people, “Are you Old Testament or New Testament Christians?” At first the missionaries didn't understand what they meant, but they soon found out that “Old Testament Christians” referred to those who placed a great deal of importance on church buildings, ceremonies, formalism, and tradition—those whose religion was primarily a works religion. A “New Testament Christian” was one whose major emphasis was not on the things that are seen—buildings and ceremony and pomp—but

¹ Romans 7:24–25

rather on the unseen things of the spirit and the simplicity of everyday Christian living, like that of Jesus and His disciples. What a comparison, and how true!

Too many religions and religionists are still living in the past. They have inherited too many hangovers from pagan idolatry with its love and worship of buildings, sanctimonious priesthood, elaborate trappings, complicated ceremonies, and superstitious traditions. Their leaders have exerted a dictatorial stranglehold on the souls of men, making merchandise of them through their insistence on salvation by works—their kind of works, their particular religion, the special corner on God that they claim to have!

In the Old Testament, God had a hard time getting the children of Israel away from the idolatry of Egypt. He used the Mosaic Law as their schoolmaster to teach simple truths through object lessons and rituals: the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and animal sacrifices. These were types and shadows, analogies, mere pictures of the spiritual realities and eternal truths He was trying to lead them into, almost like you would do with little children.¹ He had to take what they understood—the forms and ceremonies that they were familiar with in the religions of Egypt and other heathen nations around them—in a fatherly attempt to audio-visualize for them the genuine spiritual truths of the true mature

¹ Galatians 3:24–25

worship of God Himself. As the apostle Paul says, these were all “copies of the true,”¹ mere visual likenesses or illustrations of the unseen realities of the spirit world.

Paul says, “When that which is perfect has come [Jesus’ Second Coming], then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”²

Paul was saying that even the gifts of the Holy Spirit of this New Testament era are almost like toys, gifts from a loving Father to His simple little children, to help communicate understanding of Himself and His will.

How much more, then, were the material object lessons of the temple worship of the Old Testament childish toys for even tinier children spiritually, to help them understand their heavenly Father’s love? But “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”³

When Jesus came, He told the Samaritan woman at the well, “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship

¹ Hebrews 9:24

³ Hebrews 1:1–2

² I Corinthians 13:10–12 KJV

Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”¹ This is the spiritual era in which we are now living.

But Paul goes even further than this in his prediction to the early Christians of Corinth when he says that the time is coming when we shall see Jesus face to face and put away even these childlike gifts of communication in the spirit. For “whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”² Even what we have now is only a sample of the glorious realities to come!

In the Old Testament were the illustrations, and in the present New Testament era are the spiritual truths that we have now by faith alone.³ But when Jesus comes again, we shall see Him as He is and literally be like Him and actually experience the fullness of the realities of God and the world to come!

“Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”⁴

¹ John 4:23–24

³ John 1:17

² I Corinthians 13:8–10

⁴ I John 3:2

Hallelujah for Happiness!

In many religions the more the devotees suffer and the sadder they are, the more religious they are considered to be. But for the born-again Christian, it's supposed to be just the opposite! One measure of Christians' spirituality or religiosity is whether they're victorious and smiling and really happy.

God hasn't made religion difficult and grievous, and Jesus certainly didn't make it that way. Not even Moses, with all the strict laws he laid down, made it that way. That's always been the fault of religious leaders and teachers who changed things and interpreted things to suit themselves, to exalt themselves and to try to get a tighter control on the people—who as Jesus said, “bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”¹

I don't see how any people are ever going to be truly happy without the Lord. Even if they have all

¹ Matthew 23:4

of their physical needs supplied, they have to have something to satisfy their spiritual needs and their hunger for happiness. Thank God that's what we have in Jesus!

I'm no ascetic. I couldn't be satisfied with sitting on a bed of nails, torturing myself, denying myself everything, and fasting all the time. I enjoy everything God has given, and I'm very happy!

Even our work makes us happy—if it's work that we know is doing some good and helping people. Our religion makes us happy, our work makes us happy, our play makes us happy, and we have very little that makes us unhappy, except the fact that some other people are not happy.

Sometimes wondering if I made the right decision or choice or did the right thing concerns me, so that for a little while I'm not as happy as I should be. But I always come out of the woods afterwards to find out that the Lord helped everything work out for the best and I shouldn't have worried after all.¹

And we are sometimes sick, of course. That may not make us feel very happy for a while, but even that doesn't destroy our total happiness. Our physical condition may leave a little something to be desired—health and strength—but it doesn't make us all that unhappy. We can still be very happy in spirit and in mind.

¹ Romans 8:28

When I see people who aren't happy, I always figure there must be something wrong with their religion. That's why we should take every opportunity we get to urge others to enjoy the same happiness that we have. If they haven't got it and they see that we do, they're going to wonder what the difference is, and they're going to want it too—and the difference, of course, is Jesus!

So, hallelujah for happiness! Thank God for a happy religion and a happy life! Thank the Lord for being able to enjoy all the physical pleasures He gives us, as well as the spiritual pleasures. We've got everything! The only thing I can think of that I want is for other people to be as happy as I am. That's the only real longing or need that I have—the desire to help others understand all that Jesus has to offer, and to help make them happy.

Thank God for happiness and enjoyment of life, our religion, and the Lord! As I often sing:

Happy now, happy now,
Since I found the favor of my loving Savior.
All the past, gone at last,
And I don't care when or how, praise God!
I'm happy now, happy now,
I have lasting joy!
Oh, the Devil's deserted,
And I am converted,
And I'm happy, happy, happy, happy now!

Be So Happy!

There once was a poor young man who wanted to impress upon a rich lady how hungry he was, hoping to get a handout in the way of a good meal. So he got down on his hands and knees on her front lawn and pretended to eat the grass. When the lady saw him from a window, she rushed to the front door. “Oh, my dear poor boy!” she exclaimed. “Why don’t you go around to the back yard? The grass is much longer there!” The generosity of some people!

We all need a good sense of humor. The Bible says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine.”¹ God created us with a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at things that are funny, so I’m sure He Himself has a sense of humor—especially when I look at some of the things and people He has created and the funny situations He lets them get into. Someone once said that a sense of humor is the ability to see the funny side of a serious situation,

¹ Proverbs 17:22

and to laugh at things when they're not the way they ought to be.

It reminds me of a very old-fashioned formal preacher I knew a long time ago. When leading the church service each Sunday, he would always wear a formal frock coat and trousers, similar to a modern-day tuxedo. He was so particular about the crease in his trousers that while waiting in his office for his part of the service to begin, he would take them off and hang them up, rather than sit down and risk wrinkling them.

One Sunday morning, he was sitting in his office when he suddenly remembered that he was supposed to make an important announcement to all the children, who had just finished Sunday school. He quickly jumped up and dashed out of his office and onto the platform shouting, "Children! Children! Just a moment! I have something very important to show you!"

The kids turned around and looked back at him. For a moment there was a stunned silence. A roar of laughter followed, as they beheld the preacher standing there, holding the announcement high in the air, his boxer shorts and bare knees clearly visible above the altar rail! His young congregation obviously had a good sense of humor!

However, *he* did not, for when he looked down to see what they were laughing at, he nearly fainted! He barely managed to stumble back into his office, where he collapsed, instead of being able to laugh

at himself and his own ridiculous failure to put his pants on before he went onto the platform.

There is such a thing as being too sober and taking some things too seriously, especially ourselves. The ability to laugh at ourselves and our own silly mistakes is a great asset and helps keep us humble. But he who can't laugh at his own mistakes or take the mistakes of others with a sense of humor either has too much pride or too severe a sense of life. God intended for us to enjoy living, and He has given us the ability, the senses, and the environment to do so. Our main purpose in life, as Martin Luther once said, is "to love God and enjoy Him forever!"—And I might add, to help others do the same by telling them of God's love and the happy life He offers us all.

Even the martyrs of the early church didn't die sadly or sorrowfully, but singing and shouting and praising God. If there's anything we, as Christians, are supposed to be, it's a happy people, because we've got more to be happy about than anybody else in the world.¹ We have the happy love of Jesus, who takes all our burdens, carries all our cares, and lightens all of our sorrows. Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light,² and that it is the way of the transgressor that's hard.³

If you're finding His yoke too hard or too heavy to bear, then maybe you're transgressing by not obey-

¹ Psalm 144:15

³ Proverbs 13:15 KJV

² Matthew 11:28–30

ing Him and “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”¹ “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you.”² Maybe you’re trying to carry too much and pull too hard. Let go and let God! Let Jesus do it! Don’t work so hard. Just let the Lord do it through you. Maybe you’re trying too hard, instead of letting God do it by His power, His love, His grace and His strength. We’re not the Christian *Endeavor* Society! In other words, we’re not the Christian *Triers*, but the Lord *Let-ers*, for without Him we are nothing and can of our own selves do nothing.³

So stop working so hard in your own strength. Quit taking yourself so seriously! Stop and praise the Lord and have a good laugh at your own weaknesses and ridiculous inability to do anything or accomplish anything for the Lord, knowing that if anything’s going to get done, it’s the Lord who’s got to do it through you!

If God can use us, He can use anybody—because we’re nobody! You ought to absolutely crack up laughing at yourself and how ridiculous you are, instead of trying to be so sober and taking yourself so seriously. If He could even use Balaam’s ass to talk to someone,⁴ He can use us too! What a sense of humor God has! That ought to cheer anybody up. So why not have a good laugh at yourself and admit that whenever you do something right, it’s God that’s doing it through you?

¹ 1 Peter 5:7

² Psalm 55:22

³ John 15:5

⁴ Numbers 22:23–31

When I was a young man, I knew a dear old missionary who had evangelized the forbidden country of Tibet for 25 years, four years of it behind Communist lines. As he helped wash the dinner dishes one evening, I marveled at his humility, his grace, and his happy, cheerful spirit. Here was a great man who had done a wonderful work for the Lord and should have been very famous, humbly washing dishes with me.

Since I was planning to become a missionary myself, I asked him a question that I considered he, of all people, ought to know the answer to: "What quality do you think a missionary needs the most?" I expected some solemn and profound answer from his greatly superior wisdom and vast wealth of experience, so you can imagine how shocked I was when he paused with his hands in the sink and looked at me with a smile and said, "A sense of humor—to be able to laugh when you feel like crying!" He went on to explain that often, under the almost unbearable tension of the most frightening circumstances, a good laugh nearly saved their lives and their nerves. As he put it, "If you know the Lord's going to take care of things somehow, you can afford to smile and laugh at how impossible a situation may seem, and how ridiculous the circumstances are. You know God has *got* to do a miracle!"

When I was a child, my parents frequently traveled in their service for the Lord, and they often took us children with them. I remember what a thrill it

was when we got down to our last cent. It was time for God to do a miracle, and we got so excited that we could hardly wait! We would look expectantly in this direction and that, wondering where His supply was going to come from and what unusual or different thing He was going to do this time to provide for us. Maybe we'd find some money in the bottom of one of our bags, or meet an old friend who would invite us home to dinner and give us a place to lay our heads for the night.

Sometimes it was really comical! Once, we didn't have a penny to our name, but we needed to buy milk for breakfast. My mother said, "Don't worry, children, the Lord will supply! Let's go for a walk before breakfast." And as we stood on the street corner, a brand-new dime (which happened to be just enough to buy a bottle of milk in those days) fell out of the sky and rolled across the sidewalk! We never could figure out how it got there or where it fell from or who dropped it, unless it was God Himself. How funny can you get, dropping coins from the sky! Who else would run his business that way? But God *likes* to do things differently and in many ways that look downright ridiculous, outlandishly funny, and seemingly impossible to us! It shows His power and that He's not bound by convention, tradition, custom or "impossibilities."

So keep a good sense of humor! Be able to laugh at yourself. You're just about the funniest thing God ever made, and being reminded of that fact ought to

help keep you humble. Humor certainly does help to humble you. There's nothing like the humiliation of a good-natured joke on ourselves to help keep us from getting self-righteous and too sober and severe. Keep humble with good humor! Laugh at yourself!

Just don't overdo it, as there's a time for everything. There's a time to laugh, and a time to weep—a time for everything.¹ But let's always be able to smile through our tears. A ray of sunshine is even more beautiful in the midst of rain. Let's have a little more sunshine and laughter, and not so much gloom and doom! The world knows enough Hell; let's show them a little more Heaven! “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.”² As the American poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850–1919) wrote, “Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone.”³

So let's be happy! Don't be gloomy and sullen, lest you be like old Jenny the mule. After a Sunday of constantly hearing “no” and “don't” at the farm of his long-faced, religiously strict grandfather who wouldn't allow him to play on Sunday, poor little Johnny wandered wistfully out to the barnyard and stroked Jenny's long nose. “Dear Jenny, you must be *awfully* religious,” he said, “because you have such a long face, just like Grandfather's!” That's some people's idea of religion. Please don't let it be yours!

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1–4

³ “Solitude”

² Matthew 5:12

Lovelight

Life on Earth wouldn't be possible without the Sun, because all life depends on photosynthesis—the process in green plants and certain other organisms by which food and cells needed for growth are synthesized, using light as an energy source. In turn, those plants and other organisms provide nourishment for animal life. Without the Sun, there wouldn't be anything to eat and all life would cease to exist. So in a sense, every living thing eats sunshine. No wonder the ancients worshiped the Sun! It's a type or symbol of God because it not only gives us light and warmth, but it actually manufactures the food that we eat.

Without the warmth of the Sun, Earth would be too cold to support life—like on the dark side of the Moon and other places in space that are shielded from the Sun's rays, where temperatures are hundreds of degrees below zero.

The Sun's gravitational pull also keeps Earth in its orbit. It keeps the whole world on the right track.

The Sun performs these four major functions: It gives light, supplies warmth, produces food, and provides the gravitational pull needed to keep Earth in orbit. Now if the Sun has that much power, think how much spiritual power our *spiritual* sun, God, has!

God's physical creation often illustrates spiritual truths, and I'm sure He created the Sun, the Moon, the stars, Earth and the other planets the way He did in part to help us better understand our relationship with Him.

God is a Spirit, and the Bible also says that He is light.¹ If He is both of those things and if light can be powerful energy, as science has proven, then the Spirit of God can also be powerful energy—spiritual energy.

Without the light of the Sun, we'd be in total darkness, except for starlight. Even the Moon wouldn't shine without the Sun, because the Moon has no light of its own; it only reflects the light of the Sun. Just so, if it weren't for the Lord we would be in almost total spiritual darkness.

Without the warmth of the Sun's rays, we'd also freeze to death. In fact, we'd freeze solid! Without the Lord, we'd all be dead cold spiritually.

Without the Sun's rays, there would be no food, and without the Lord to feed us spiritually, our spirits would die of hunger.

Finally, without the Sun's gravitational pull, instead of staying in its well-planned orbit, Earth

¹ John 4:24; 1 John 1:5

would go wandering off through space and probably crash into some other astral body eventually. Without God's guidance, His gravitational pull on us in the spiritual world, we too would certainly get out of the well-planned orbit of His will—our proper spiritual orbit—and we'd go wandering off into the darkness of spiritual space and probably crack up somewhere.

Wandering off in spiritual darkness is like being out of orbit, having no direction, no guidance—lost in space! That's what people who don't have the Lord are like: They're lost in spiritual space, spiritual darkness. Cold, hungry people are wandering around in darkness without God, just as Earth would be without the Sun.

God even calls the wayward angels, the rebellious angels and spiritual powers of the Devil “wandering stars.”¹ They've tried to run away from His control. They've left their center and gotten out of orbit. In their rebellion, they're wandering off, lost in space! That has the most horrible sound to it—“lost in space”—wandering off through the vast darkness of space, so alone! It's just like people without the Lord—freezing, starving, blind, and lost.

God is our sun; we are His moon. We merely reflect His light. And when should we reflect His light the most? When does the Moon shine brightest?—At night, when the Sun is out of sight. As the world slips deeper and deeper into spiritual

¹ Jude 6, 13

darkness, so we must keep on shining and lighting the world with His reflected light.

We are also like the Sun's rays. Each of us who has received Jesus as our Savior is like a sunbeam, a little ray of sunshine coming from the Lord. Each of us has become part of His light and part of His power, spiritually.

The Bible tells us that God is also love.¹ Love is the power and light of God. So when you give God's love to people, you're showing them His light.

God's Spirit of love and power and light will lead you to those who especially need your loving help and who will respond in loving appreciation, just as it will also lead them to you.

Have you got God's lovelight? You do if you have Him! Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love, and if you have Jesus, you have God's lovelight too!

¹ | John 4:8

Squeeze!—Don't Jerk!

One day my wife and I were in a hurry to get home to do our work, our writing, but instead we sat down on a lovely rock wall to enjoy the view for a moment—when we got this inspiration:

There is hardly anything that can be enjoyed in a hurry—a glass of wine, a walk, a talk, a ride, a view, a meal, or an embrace. God is hardly ever in a hurry! It takes Him time to make a baby, a flower, a tree, a sunset, or even a blade of grass.

It's a funny thing, but thoughts like this used to come to me when I was a little boy, sitting on a hill. I used to think and wonder about what everything in creation meant—that it was all an illustration of something; everything *said* something!

The sea is always peaceful and quiet and slow and leisurely, except when there's a storm.

Speed kills. Haste makes waste. Patience takes faith. If you're in a hurry, you miss things, lose things, forget things, and wear out quickly. You may live it up, but you might not be able to live it *down*.

You may marry in haste but repent at leisure! You may save a minute but lose a life! You may be pennywise but pound foolish.

If you go slow, you get there quicker—at least you *get* there. Better late than never; better safe than sorry! If you stop to look before you leap, you may not have to leap at all. A miss is as good as a mile! It takes time to aim straight.

When I was in the army, we often had target practice at the shooting range. Some of the targets were moving, while others appeared for a moment and then disappeared. Many of the other soldiers were in such a hurry to shoot for fear that the target would disappear, that they missed it altogether. They got so excited that they jerked the trigger so quick and hard that it jerked the whole rifle, which caused them to miss the mark, the target. But I took time to rest my elbow firmly, hold my rifle securely, aim accurately, and squeeze the trigger slowly. I learned to wait until I was sure I could hit the bull's eye, and then fired. I got so good at this that I was rated as a sharpshooter, an expert rifleman with nine out of ten bull's eyes in competition. I was neither hasty, nor did I forget to fire altogether. I took reasonable time to aim straight and *squeeze*, not jerk! Squeeze, don't jerk, or you'll miss something!

Rome wasn't built in a day. Once when I was in a big hurry to do something, the Lord spoke to me with the following illustration:

It takes *time* to build a house. First, you must lay the foundation solidly, then lay brick upon brick and stone upon stone, firmly with mortar, each piece fitting accurately—and you cannot do this in a *hurry*, or your wall will crumble. Then the roof must be laid securely, beam upon beam, rafter upon rafter, roofing tile upon roofing tile. Then come the plasterers; then the finishers to hang windows and doors, lay floor coverings, and finally paint. Then at last, you have a building fitly joined together—a beautiful sight to see—a well-made structure built slowly and well to *last!*

But I've seen some buildings thrown up in a hurry that were, as some crooked contractors used to joke, “strong enough to get out of them before they fall!”—And it's this kind that collapse in storms and kill their occupants! I saw thousands of buildings demolished by a hurricane once. Thousands of people were killed because of faulty, hasty construction that could not stand the wind of adversity.

You can have peace even in the midst of storm if you know you are secure and at rest in a safe building—strong, solid, well built, immovable by the wildest gale. A *good* building doesn't get up and run away. It's not blown away by the storm. It just sits tight until the storm blows over.

We are to wait on the Lord. “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,”¹ instead of wearing out. “You will keep him in perfect peace,

¹ Isaiah 40:31

whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”¹ Those who believe enter into rest.²

Rest in the Lord! Patience takes faith. Tribulation teaches patience, because it *compels* you to trust the Lord, to have faith in God for the outcome.³

“He sins who hastens with his feet.”⁴ “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. ...

‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”⁵ They are tossed to and fro, and they cannot rest. But “there remains a rest for the people of God”.⁶

Squeeze, don’t jerk, or you’ll miss something—and missing the mark of God is sin!

When Moses was in a hurry to deliver the children of Israel, he killed an Egyptian and had to flee for his own life, alone. But after 40 years of patiently, humbly tending sheep in the wilderness, with time to listen to the voice of God instead of his own impulses, he was finally ready for the slow, laborious, patient work of the Exodus—slow, but sure!

Then he spent 40 days and nights on the mountain and heard from God, but in one split second of anger, he broke all Ten Commandments and had to go back up and spend *another* 40 days there. His haste took him twice as long.⁷

In Aesop’s fable, “The Tortoise and the Hare,” the hare never made it, but the tortoise did!

¹ Isaiah 26:3

² Hebrews 4:3

³ Romans 5:3

⁴ Proverbs 19:2

⁵ Isaiah 57:20–21

⁶ Hebrews 4:9

⁷ Exodus chapters 32–34

My wife used to say to me on the way to some meeting or appointment, “Now, Honey, we don’t have time for any of your shortcuts!” She knew what usually happened when I started cutting across country trying to find a quicker way: We’d get lost and wind up later than ever!

Squeeze, don’t jerk, or you’ll miss the mark—and that’s a sin.

Sometimes my wife gets very impatient with me because I don’t answer her immediately when she asks me a question, but it takes time to think and pray, to be sure I give the right answer. Anybody can reply immediately, but are they really saying anything? Be slow to speak and slow to anger.¹ Go slow. Take your time. You’ll enjoy things more, and you’ll get more out of life.

My father used to sing a funny little ditty: “Never let yourself get worried, hurried or flurried, or else you’ll find yourself getting harried, married or buried!”

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.”² But it takes time even to study the busy little antics of the ant, to learn anything from her. Don’t be slothful, but be diligent in business.³ The sloth hangs there on the limb all day with his eyes shut, sleeping, scarcely moving, till he looks like part of the tree. He’s not just slow; he acts like he’s *dead!*

¹ James 1:19

³ Romans 12:11

² Proverbs 6:6

Be “temperate in all things.”¹ “Let your moderation be known to all men.”² Don’t run too fast, lest you stumble, and don’t just sit there. Do something, but “walk circumspectly.”³

Squeeze, don’t jerk, or you may miss the mark—and that’s a sin!

¹ I Corinthians 9:25

² Philippians 4:5 KJV

³ Ephesians 5:15

Go Slow— You'll Get There Quicker

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”¹ The Bible doesn’t promote hurry. The only verse I can remember any preachers or anybody else using to try to make us rush was, “The king’s business required haste.”² But for that one Scripture, I think there must be a hundred that tell us to go slow, or words to that effect—even to take it easy.

Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”³ When you get under too much pressure and too much tension, too heavy a burden and too hard a yoke, it’s not *God’s* fault. It is somebody else’s fault, or your own!

¹ Isaiah 30:15

² | Samuel 21:8

³ Matthew 11:28–30

Maybe that's why God created mules and donkeys—as an illustration of how we should pace ourselves. They are plodders; they are very slow, but they have more endurance and can carry heavier loads than horses. They are the workhorses of the backwoods. They can negotiate trails that horses would kill themselves on, carrying loads for miles that a horse couldn't, especially not a racehorse.

Racehorses can spurt for a few rounds around the track, and that's it! They're extremely high-strung, nervous, and are just not workhorses. They're not plodders; they're not load carriers. But pack mules and donkeys are—and they're as stubborn as they come! You cannot rush them. You have to do it slowly, in their time. They just plod along, but they do it and they get there. It's like Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare: The tortoise was slow but he got there!

You can have the emotion and you can have the speed; I'll take the low road and the slow road. You can take the high road and get there first if you want to—if you get there at all—but I'm going to take the low road and the slow road, and I'm determined to get there in one piece, no matter how long it takes.

I can't count the times I've told taxi drivers, "Go slow and you live longer. Live fast and you'll die quicker." That certainly is true. Doctors and health experts have said that pressure and tension is killing people, and that many of today's illnesses are either from pressure and tension, or improper diet. Pres-

sure and speed are killing people through heart trouble, nervous trouble, and high blood pressure.

Lord help us to go slow! We shouldn't waste time, but we need to trust the Lord instead of being rushed and impatient. Patience indicates slowness, plodding along, doing our work persistently, and not wasting time, but also not getting fretful and worried and all worked up about it. Impatience is marked by speed, hurry, rush, haste, push, pressure, tension! Patience shows faith. Impatience shows lack of faith. Impatience shows that we don't think the job is going to get done unless we hurry and push it and rush it.

But if we've got faith that Jesus is going to take care of it somehow, we can afford to be patient and go slow and do it right.

Holy Holes

Where would we be without holes? Where would people be without seven holes in their heads? (Count 'em!) If it weren't for your seven holes, you couldn't eat or taste or smell or hear or see or even breathe. And actually, you've got lots more holes than that, because every little pore in your skin is a hole. Without those little pores, your skin couldn't breathe and you couldn't sweat. Without holes, you wouldn't have any hair either, because every hair grows in a little hole called a follicle.

Holes are an almost endless subject because there are so many of them! It seems like *everything* is composed of holes. Your whole body is full of holes. Your blood vessels are holes, your lungs are holes, your heart's got big holes in it for the blood to flow in and out, and your navel is a hole without which you couldn't have been born. Wow! There are so many important holes! We're really *full* of holes!

Just think, if it weren't for a hole, a 10 would only be a 1. And if you think a hole is really nothing, it

really isn't so, because if you add another hole, it makes the 10 a 100! And if you add another zero hole, it turns the 100 into a 1,000! Add three more holes and it makes 1,000,000! So just an insignificant little old 1 can be a whole 1,000,000 if you just add six holes. As you can see, holes are very important and useful. God must really like holes, He made so many of them!

The whole world is full of holes! If it weren't for holes, there wouldn't be any pretty trees or flowers or vegetables or fruit, because they all grow in holes in the ground and they're full of holes: The sap in the trees flows through holes, and the juice in the leaves flows through holes.

What is a house but a hole in which you live? And if your house didn't have window holes, you couldn't look out or let the light and air in. Without holes there wouldn't be any taps for water and you'd get awfully thirsty. And worst of all, the house wouldn't even have a door, so you couldn't get into it in the first place—or if you were inside, you couldn't get out! How many other useful holes can you think of?

Earth itself is a hollow sphere full of fire, and every now and then the fire comes out through holes called volcanoes. All the seas are great big holes in the ground full of water, and all the lakes and springs and wells are holes, too. We get diamonds and other jewels and all kinds of minerals—gold and silver and copper and iron and tin and lots of others—out of holes in the ground called mines.

We wouldn't have any of these useful and valuable things if it weren't for holes. The world is one great big ball of holes!

And if you could look *real* close, you would see that everything is made up of very little holes full of energy, called atoms. So everything is *mostly* holes with just a little bit of something around them. It's true!

Everything is more *nothing* than anything—like the universe is mostly space. The universe is a great big hole full of nothing, except for few things called planets and stars and moons and things like that, which are all very, very small compared to all that nothing called space that surrounds them. The universe is such a great big hole that we don't even know where it ends. So much nothing!

The Bible says that God even hung the world on nothing,¹ and that He made it out of nothing.² So you see, there is a lot more nothing than anything else, and everything is made mostly out of nothing. God makes everything out of nothing—nothing surrounded by Him!

If you can believe in God, then *anything* is possible, because He makes everything out of nothing—even you and me! We're nothing and we're impossible except for God. He takes our nothing and makes it something. He's like the circle around our nothing that makes it something. With God all around you,

¹ Job 26:7

² Genesis chapter 1; Hebrews 11:3

even your nothing can be something. In fact, you can be almost anything!

So the next time you see a hole, remember it wouldn't even be a hole if there wasn't something around it—and you're just like that hole! If you feel like nothing or a big zero or only a hole, just surround yourself with God's something and you can become a very useful and important little hole—nothing surrounded by God, out of which He made everything. You could be almost anything if you're a good hole—a nothing that's got God around it—because God is in the business of making some-things out of nothings.

There's no end to nothing. There's always an end to something, but there's never an end to nothing. So if you'll just be nothing, you can even be bigger than something.

The poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) wrote:

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us—don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!

All the big somebodies wouldn't be anybody if it weren't for us nobodies; all the people that think they're something wouldn't be anything if it weren't for us nothings!

And do you know what love is? It's a hole that needs to be filled—plus something to fill it with, like you and me and Jesus.

There are square holes and round holes and all kinds of holes, and it takes all kinds of pegs to fill them, so whatever kind of peg you are, somewhere there's a hole where you'll fit. And no matter what kind of hole you are, God's got you pegged!

All holes are nothing made for something, so if you feel like nothing, there's something for you somewhere. Are you a hole? Then God's got something for you!

Folks that aren't holes can't have anything, because they already think they're something, when they are really nothing. The Bible says: "If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself,"¹ and God "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."² If a hole is already full, God can't put anything into it. Everything falls out when He tries to put something into it, because it's already so full of something that it can't hold anything more. You've got to be a *hole* to *hold* something. Who ever heard of trying to fill anything but a hole?

¹ Galatians 6:3

² Luke 1:53

God loves holes. Scientists used to say, “Nature abhors a vacuum,” but I say, “God *loves* holes, because He loves to fill them up.” Are you a good hole full of nothing? Then God can fill you with something and make you a very happy hole full of anything God wants to fill you with!

You’ve got to be nothing to be something, so please be one of God’s little holes, will you? Let’s be holy too, okay? Are you a hole? Then you’re holy. Let’s all be holy holes!

And do you know what? Jesus even called Himself a hole: the Door.¹ He is the Hole you’ve got to get through to get into His Father’s house, and He is the *only* Hole you can go through.² Have you entered the Father’s house through Jesus, the Hole, the only Door?

¹ John 10:9

² John 14:6

Count Your Blessings

The Lord had me review my whole life this morning to see how He has blessed me and taken care of me. It was like one of those near-death experiences that you hear about in which people see their whole lives in an instant, only I didn't have to almost die to see mine.

The review started when I was practically still a baby, and it included all the outstanding things the Lord has done especially for me—experiences and accomplishments and promises that He kept. He reminded me of how He has taken care of me and blessed me and helped me be a blessing to others. He had me review my life so I would stop and count my blessings and realize that things aren't as bad as they sometimes seem.

The Devil doesn't accuse me for what I've accomplished; he accuses me for what I *haven't* done or *could* have done or *should* have done but didn't. He picks at all my lacks and shortcomings and weaknesses, all my little failures. He's the accuser of the saints.¹

¹ Revelation 12:9–10

He picks at any little thing he can find and tries to find fault, just like the scribes and the Pharisees who followed Jesus around, picking at little things He supposedly did wrong. The Devil certainly must have inspired Jesus' accusers. Jesus was teaching great truths and performing all kinds of miracles. He healed thousands of people and fed thousands upon thousands. He taught wonderful lessons and told such beautiful, meaningful parables. And what did the religious leaders do? Did they praise Jesus and thank God for all the good He was doing? When He healed the lame man, when He delivered the man who was demon-possessed, and every other chance they got, what did they do?—They tried to find some fault, some flaw.¹

The Devil just nags and nags and picks and picks and tries to worry us about little things, like he did with Job and others, and like he did with me this morning: “What about this? What about that? Why don't you do this? Why didn't you do that? Why don't you get to work? Look at all the things you could be doing instead of just sitting there doing nothing!” Well, this morning I wasn't doing nothing. I was praying and talking to the Lord when the Devil tried to butt in and interfere and interrupt my prayer time with the Lord.

But the Lord knew exactly what I needed! He helped me count my blessings by taking me through

¹ Matthew 12:10–14, 22–24; Mark 7:1–3; Luke 11:53–54; 23:2, 14; John 8:3–6

that pictorial review of my life and showing me all the things I should be thankful for instead of letting the Devil get me to doubt and complain. It was a thrilling experience to see how marvelously the Lord has protected me and provided for me and used me. The Lord just slapped the old Devil in the face by showing him and me pictures of what He has done for me and helped me do. The Devil had to tuck his tail between his legs and run away because he couldn't deny that it was the truth.

All those doubts and fears and accusations of the Devil were either outright lies or so petty by comparison that they didn't really matter, even if they *were* true. The Devil was trying to find a chink in my armor—some little hole, some Achilles heel or weak spot—and then exaggerate it and blow it up out of all proportion in order to try to get me discouraged about myself. But thank the Lord, He's the antidote! Jesus always points out the *good* things.

That's the secret: When the Devil descends on you with his dark thoughts about yourself or others, let the light in! Rebuke the Devil and think positive thoughts instead. Remind yourself constantly of the good.

When I was young, I would sometimes hear a song on the radio that had a bad message or a bad spirit, and the Devil would try to bring me down by keeping that song running through my head. So what did I do?—I'd either listen to some good music, or I'd come right out and sing an uplifting song myself if I was where I could.

Fight the Devil positively. Attack! Attack! Let the light in, and the darkness will flee. There isn't room for both. You just have to be positive; you have to make a conscious effort to rebuke the Devil and think positive good thoughts instead. Quote Scriptures or sing songs about the Lord or pray. You can't do those things and have the Devil's negative thoughts run through your head at the same time. Jesus wins the victory every time, but you have to do your part by making a conscious effort to resist the Devil.

You have to act and attack. That chases the Devil away every time. Sing or quote Scripture out loud. It chases away the doubts and the fears. Think positively about yourself and others. It chases away those nagging little suggestions from the Devil. Don't just sit there, do something! Take some positive action.

The Devil can't resist God's Word. That's one of the most powerful weapons you can use against him. If you quote Scripture to the Devil, there's nothing he can say in return. The Devil tried to twist Scriptures and use them against Jesus, but Jesus shot the Devil's arguments full of holes with the *right* applications of other Scriptures.¹

There will always be something more you could have done or something you wish you hadn't done. There will always be little things—neglects or oversights or mistakes or faults or bad habits—that the

¹ Luke chapter 4

Devil can pick on if he wants to, and he sure wants to! He really tries, but you can overcome his accusations with positive actions. Quote Scriptures that deny the lie! Thank and praise God for all your blessings and all the things that are contradictory to what the Devil's telling you. Or get busy doing something positive with your hands, your eyes, your ears. Idleness is the Devil's workshop.

Count your blessings! Fill your mind and heart and mouth with positive things. Chase away the Devil and all his shades of night by letting the light in, God's positive light of Scripture, the Word, prayer, praise, songs, or anything else you can use to completely occupy your mind with good things. Get busy helping somebody else! It's kind of a work therapy. It's a prayer and praise therapy! It's a Scripture therapy! It's song therapy!—And it chases the Devil away.

It also helps to call to mind a mental picture of Jesus, and to think about Him and talk to Him. The Bible promises, "You [God] will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."¹ When you think about the Lord and put Him in the focal point of your consciousness, this pushes the Devil and all his doubts and lies and fears to the outer fringes.

The Devil hates Scripture, he hates praise and thanksgiving, he hates songs about the Lord's goodness, and he especially hates positive work for the

¹ Isaiah 26:3

Lord. So get your mouth and mind and hands busy for the Lord: Sing, pray, praise the Lord, quote Scripture! Do something positive! Do something good! Count your blessings and put the Devil on the run!

Praise Power

My wife, Maria, was feeling very tired and had such a headache earlier today that she had become discouraged about her health. As I prayed for her, I was reminded of the verse that tells us not to be weary and faint in our minds.¹ I think the Lord wanted to inspire her to have a little more fight.

Our spiritual enemy, the Devil, really fights us, but as long as *we* keep fighting back, he can't win. It reminds me of a song my mother used to sing when the going got tough:

Keep on believing; God answers prayer.
Keep on believing; He's still up there.
Sorrows and troubles will soon disappear:
Nothing can harm you when Jesus is near.

Keep on believing; the storm will pass,
Look for the rainbow; 'twill come at last.

¹ Hebrews 12:3 KJV

Trust in His promise: 'twas written for you.
Keep on believing and praise your way through!

The original lyrics say, “Keep on believing and *pray* your way through,” but my mother was a great one for praise so she sang it, “*Praise* your way through.” That’s how you get the victory! If you *believe* in prayer, you’re going to start praising the Lord for answering your prayers even before you see those answers.

So I said to Maria, “You need to fight, and you need to praise the Lord more instead of talking about your weakness and headaches. As long as you’re thinking about the Word and the Lord and you’ve got a song or a praise in your mouth, you can’t complain and moan and groan about how bad you feel.

“You need to attack the Devil! When you feel down, quote Scripture or sing a song! You need to refuse to talk about your problems. Praise the Lord and thank God for the health you *do* have!”

The Devil talks up the pain you’re feeling and aggravates it. But if you keep your heart and mind and mouth and ears busy with the Word, you won’t be so susceptible to his lies. Just outtalk him. Drown him out!

There’s something about saying the words out loud that crystallizes your resistance and causes the Devil to flee. You can pray in your mind under some circumstances, but when you’re having a real

battle with the Devil over sickness or something else, you've got to say it out loud; you've got to fill your mind and heart and mouth with declarations of faith and praise and prayer and the Word.

The Word is your offensive weaponry. The apostle Paul, back in the first century, referred to the Word as the sword of the Spirit.¹ But the Word is far more powerful and effective than that. When it comes to fighting the Devil, God's Words are like bullets or death rays. Every word zaps the Enemy! There is absolute power in the Word!

God will keep in perfect peace, those whose minds are fixed on Him.² If you keep your mind on the Lord, that keeps you from thinking about your troubles. This is why it's so important to keep praising the Lord and quoting Scriptures and praying out loud. It takes concentration, and that occupies more of your mind.

Whatever you do, don't go around moaning and groaning and complaining and spreading the Devil's doubts and lies! The minute you feel like doing that, go on the attack by praising the Lord. Sing! Quote Scripture! Do something positive!

I've often been quite sick but didn't even want to admit it because I didn't want to give the Devil the satisfaction of hearing me talk about it! However, sometimes the Lord allowed it to get so bad that I had to humble myself and ask for prayer. Sometimes we can be too proud to ask for prayer; that's

¹ Ephesians 6:10–17; Hebrews 4:12

² Isaiah 26:3

one thing. But when you're fighting the Enemy and don't want to give the Devil the satisfaction of hearing you talk about it, that's another thing! I can remember my father praising the Lord and singing and rebuking the Devil, even though he was quite sick.

Maria asked, "Isn't that being dishonest, to act like I'm not sick when I am?" And immediately the story in the Bible about the prophet Elisha and the Shunammite woman came to mind.¹ One day the woman's young son died of sunstroke out in the field. Immediately, his mother took him into the house and put him in the room she had built for Elisha to stay in whenever he passed that way. She laid the boy on the prophet's bed and ran off to Mount Carmel, some miles away, where she found Elisha. He greeted her and asked, "Is it well with you?" and she answered, "It is well." Then Elisha asked, "Is it well with the boy?" and she said, "It is well." Was she lying? No. She had faith that even though the boy was dead, he was in God's hands and it *was* well with him! And *then* she told Elisha what had happened and asked the prophet to come and pray for her son, who was then miraculously raised from the dead!

It's not that the Lord wants you to hide the fact that you're sick. You *should* humble yourself and admit that you're sick so others can pray for you to be healed, but you shouldn't go around complaining

¹ Kings 4:8–37

about it. That's not faith. Admit it and ask for prayer, but then try to be cheerful, encouraging, and show you have faith. Be positive and praise the Lord!

You need to take a positive stand against the Devil and his attacks. Resist the Enemy, God's Word tells us, and he will flee from you.¹ If you just accept it, that's bad—and if you complain about it, that's even worse because then you're testifying to the Devil's handiwork!

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous,”² but most of them are minor, thank the Lord. They are just enough to keep us close to the Lord and praying and trusting and praising the Lord and asking the Lord for help. King David of old said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your Word,” and, “Unless Your [Word] had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.”³ That's probably why the Lord allows His children to have many afflictions—because that's what keeps them righteous!

When you seem to be excessively tired or have frequent headaches or other troubles, it's natural to wonder why you're feeling bad. Well, now you know: It's so you can go on the attack and resist the Devil, because it's him fighting you! Also, the Lord may be trying to teach you something else through your suffering. That passage in Hebrews chapter 12 that talks about not fainting in your mind also says a

¹ James 4:7

³ Psalm 119:67, 92

² Psalm 34:19

lot about chastening, or training. I think dear Maria is learning her lesson, because I haven't heard her complain once more about her health—and she's feeling much better, too. When the Devil couldn't get her to preach defeat, he gave up!

(Prayer:) Deliver us, Jesus, out of the hands of the Evil One! We thank You for how wonderfully You've kept us and protected us and provided for us. Help us to thank You continually, all day long! Your Word tells us that You dwell, You are enthroned, in the praises of Your children¹ and that we are to come into Your gates with thanksgiving and into Your courts with praise.²

“In *everything* giving thanks.”³ Help us not to forget to be thankful continually, constantly praising You, quoting Your Word to encourage our faith and singing positive songs of praise to rebuke the Enemy. The Enemy hates to hear us praise You, and he hates to hear Your Word, so keep our mouths *full* of both, Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 22:3

² Psalm 100:4

³ | Thessalonians 5:18

“My Yoke Is Easy!”

(Written to a Christian worker who had recently undertaken a major long-term project for the Lord)

Your service for the Lord is a very great responsibility. At times it can be a heavy burden, a big job, with a lot of hard work, tension, confusion, excitement, concerns, and physical and mental stress—all of which tend to be pretty hard on you. Even the Lord Himself could not bear the strain and drain of a continual ministry to the multitudes. He frequently had to get away from it all. Either alone or with His disciples, He would go up into the mountains or out to sea or on a private visit to friends for a spiritual retreat, a time of rest, recuperation, and inspiration.

No one can continue to keep pouring out to others without spending some time alone with the Lord getting refilled. I've been in the Lord's work for half a century, and my mother for half a century before me, and my grandfather for half a century before her, so I know what I'm talking about. As A. B. Simpson (1843–1919), that grand old man of faith, once said,

“You cannot do the Master’s work without the Master’s power!” And to get that power, you must spend time with the Master!

We all need more quiet time alone with the Lord in rest and refilling, drinking at the living water of His Word and fellowshiping with Him in prayer. The following poem, which was written by my mother and was one of her favorites, is all about this:

FIRST PLACE

I was longing to serve the Master,
But alas, I was laid aside
From the busy field of workers
In the harvest field so wide.
They were few, yes, few in number,
And I could not understand
Why I should be left inactive;
It was not as I had planned.

I was longing to *serve* the Master,
And the need indeed was great.
For me it was easy to labor,
But oh, it was hard to wait,
To lie quite still and be silent,
While the song was borne to my ear,
From the busy field of workers,
In the harvest field so dear!

I was longing to serve, just to serve the Master,
But He led to a desert place,

And there as we stopped and rested,
His eyes looked down in my face.
So full of tender reproaching,
They filled me with sad surprise!
Did He think I had grudged my service,
Or counted it sacrifice?

“Oh, Master, I long to serve, just to serve Thee!
There are so few at the best.
Let me off to the fields,” I pleaded.
“I care not to stay and rest!”
I knelt at His feet imploring,
I gazed in His face above.
“My child,” He said, “don’t you know
Your service is nothing without your love?”

I was longing to serve, to serve my Master,
Oh, this was my one fond thought.
For this I was ever pleading,
As His footstool in prayer I sought.
But there in that lonely desert,
Apart from the busy scene,
It dawned on me slowly and clearly
Where my great mistake had been.

My mind was so full of service, just service,
I had drifted from *Him* apart.
And He longed for that sweet communion,
The union of heart with heart!
Well, I sought and I found forgiveness,

While mine eyes with pain were dim.
And now, though His work is still precious,
The *first* place is kept for Him!

—Virginia Brandt Berg (1885–1968)

I'm also reminded of the story about a little girl who wanted so badly to give her father a nice present for his birthday, that each evening, instead of spending time with her daddy like she usually did, she worked alone in her room, secretly knitting him a pair of bedroom slippers—and she nearly broke his heart! God may appreciate the bedroom slippers you're making for Him, but He'd rather have *you*. And the truth is, if you neglect your time with the Lord, you'll probably make an awful mess out of the “bedroom slippers” you are trying to make Him.

None of us can stand the pressure of constant demands on our time, strength, body, soul, and spirit to which we are so often forced to submit by the press of time, necessity, the needs of others, and one emergency after another. But such a state of affairs is often prevalent in a fast-moving and rapidly expanding Christian ministry where the laborers are so few, the harvest so big, and there's so much to be done to gather it in.¹

Remember, the Lord Himself has said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you

¹ Matthew 9:37–38

will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”¹ His Word also warns us that we must be “temperate in all things”² and let our “moderation be known to all men.”³ If the yoke gets too hard and the burden too heavy, it’s probably not His yoke or His burden, but our own or someone else’s which we’ve unwisely undertaken or permitted to be placed upon us beyond the Lord’s knowledge of our strength and abilities. He Himself will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.⁴

Sometimes we’re tempted to take too much upon ourselves, but certainly not by the Lord. Sometimes we allow our strength to be taxed beyond what we know we can endure. In so doing we often push ourselves beyond the measure of our own faith. When that happens, we may suffer the consequences in a physical, mental, nervous, or spiritual collapse—a breakdown. Please don’t let it happen to you! Your strength and nerves must be conserved and protected from too great a strain. Take time to be holy!—Wholly His, and whole in body, mind, and spirit!

You can go on to do a great work for the Lord—if you will take time out to be strengthened for it. “You [the Lord] will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”⁵

¹ Matthew 11:28–30

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:13

² 1 Corinthians 9:25

⁵ Isaiah 26:3

³ Philippians 4:5 KJV

The Oil Lamp

We need to learn to save the first place in our hearts and lives and time for Jesus. We belong to Him first of all, and the first place must belong to Him—for rest and prayer and fellowship with Jesus, and for feeding from His Word. We cannot do the Master's work without the Master's power—and to get it, we must spend time with the Master. Then we must let *Him* do the work through us. Many people give their needs and problems to the Lord in prayer, but then turn around and try to meet those needs and solve those problems on their own, without depending on the Lord to work on their behalf.

We ought to take a lesson from the oil lamp: It must be the oil that burns and not the wick, for if the wick burns without oil, it will destroy itself. We must immerse ourselves in Jesus and let *Him* burn to light the way, because if we try to do that ourselves, we'll soon burn out.

The flame of the lamp burns so beautifully and brightly and clearly when the *oil* burns, but it gets

smoky and stinky when just the *wick* burns. The lamp's wick must be deeply immersed in the oil. Most of the wick is in the oil, and only a tiny tip of it is exposed to the air and the flame. That way, it's mostly oil that burns and very little of the wick—almost none. The oil flows freely through a wick that is deeply soaked in the oil. Then it is the oil that burns and not the wick, and it gives bright, pure, clear light.

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”¹ It is not I that burn, but Christ must burn within me. You can be a beautiful wick, but you'll burn black with too little oil. You must soak yourself in the oil, so *you* burn not, but He burns through you. Then you'll give pure light, smokeless light, clear light, beautiful light to all that are in the house.²

When I was a boy, they had beautiful kerosene lamps in every home, on every table. They had lovely glass bowls for the oil, so you could see their wicks and the level of the oil and knew when to replenish them. The lamp burned best when full of oil. When the level got low, too much of the wick would be out of the oil for the wick to be thoroughly soaked. Then the wick itself would begin to burn faster, and the lamp would give off smoke. We sometimes try too hard, work too hard, and try to do everything ourselves. To paraphrase the chorus of an old Gospel song:

¹ Galatians 2:20

² Matthew 5:15–16

Let go and let God have His wonderful way,
Let go and let God have His way.
He'll fill with His Spirit and burn day by day.
Let go and let God have His way!

Most people don't know much about oil lamps anymore, but something that everyone can relate to is a water faucet. When you turn on a faucet, is the faucet "working"? No, it's not! The faucet is doing nothing. It's pressure *behind* the water that causes it to flow through the faucet. All you do is turn the handle on the faucet, and the water flows out with effortless ease. The faucet is just the channel, just a hole, to let the water out. You say the faucet's working? The faucet is *not* working. It's the water pressure that is doing the work. The faucet is just letting it flow. The power isn't in the faucet; the power comes from the gravity feed or pump. The pump or the weight of the water in a tank creates pressure in the water pipe, so all you have to do is turn the tap to release it, and out it flows. You're like the faucet; the Lord is the water pressure. Just open the faucet and let it flow!

So stop trying to do the work yourself, and let God do it. Let go and let God! Just let the Lord through. Let the oil burn. Let the water flow. Let the *Lord* do it!

“Be Faithful Until Death”

—Just Be Faithful Today!

(Excerpts of a talk given one New Year’s Eve.)

One of the best verses that you could claim for the coming year—and for the rest of your life, for that matter—is: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life.”¹

Some people teach that this is referring to salvation. They say, “Well, if you always do the right thing and don’t make any mistakes, if you’re perfect, if you ‘keep the faith,’ maybe you’ll make it to Heaven.” That’s *not* what that verse is talking about at all!

The Lord isn’t talking about salvation; He’s talking about your faithfulness in *service*—if you faithfully do your best to please and serve Him from now until the day you die.

The secret of being “faithful until death” is to be faithful one day at a time. You can only live one day at a time; you can only be faithful one day at a time. So

¹ Revelation 2:10 KJV

don't worry about whether you were faithful yesterday or not, or whether you're going to be faithful tomorrow. Just do your best to be faithful today. The Bible tells us to forget the past,¹ and tomorrow will take care of itself²—or the Lord will take care of it. Just be faithful today. Don't worry about your whole life! Don't keep asking yourself, "Am I going to be faithful until the day I die, so I can be sure to get a crown of life?"

Just be faithful every day, one day at a time, and you'll be faithful until death and receive an eternal crown of life. I believe that it is going to be some sort of an actual halo or shining crown that will enable us to shine like the stars.³ So that's my prayer for you, that you will be faithful every day, just one day at a time until the day you die or the Lord returns, and that you won't worry about the future.

If you think about trying to be faithful for the rest of your life, that scares you, that worries you. That's just too overwhelming, and you feel that you'll never make it. But what about today? Weren't you pretty faithful today? Surely you did a lot of things faithfully today.

I dare say that you were probably faithful today. Give the *Lord* a little credit! I'm trying to get you to appreciate yourself a little bit, and to thank the Lord for how long He has kept you faithful *already!* You have probably worried about lots of days and events that are now passed. You have probably had *many*

¹ Philippians 3:13

³ Daniel 12:3

² Matthew 6:34

worries, nearly all of which never happened. And here you are—still faithful!

Look at all the time that you wasted wondering about whether you were going to be faithful or not, or whether you were going to succeed or not, and whether you were going to still be doing your best for the Lord. All that time you worried about it was time wasted, because here you are, still loving and following the Lord, still faithful. Be thankful for that! You have been faithful—not yet “until death”—but this far!

So quit worrying about the future! Quit worrying about whether you’re going to make it tomorrow or not. Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”¹ Don’t try to live the coming year in advance, and the year after that. “I wonder if I’m going to make it through tribulation, and I wonder if I’m going to be ready when the Lord comes, and I wonder if I’m going to get any reward or crown?” Quit worrying about that! Just keep busy today. Do what you’re supposed to do today. Be faithful *today!*

The *Lord* has kept you faithful today, and you ought to thank Him for that! Too many people think that being faithful is some kind of a “good works” thing that they have to work up on their own. But that’s not where faith comes from. Faith comes from the *Lord*. He’s “the author and finisher of our faith.”² Faith comes from God’s Word.³

¹ Matthew 6:34

² Hebrews 12:2

³ Romans 10:17

If you're faithful, you're full of faith. Do you still have your faith today? Then you are full of faith. Do you still believe in Jesus today? Then you're full of faith. Do you believe you're saved? Then you're full of faith. My goodness, you're so full of faith I don't see how you can hold it all!

You've been faithful today; you've been full of faith today. So why worry about whether or not you're going to be full of faith tomorrow? You may have trials and tests, you may get discouraged, you may get tired, you may make mistakes, but so what? You'll still have your faith, so you'll still be more full of that than anything else, right?

Stop trying so hard! Stop worrying about it. We just have to depend on the Lord to keep us faithful, and trust Him that our faith won't fail, because our faith comes from *Him*. Faith is a gift of God.¹

Only the Lord can keep you faithful. Of course, you have to give Him a little cooperation. You have to pray and listen to Him, you have to read His Word, and you have to try to do what you know He wants you to do, but that's the easy part. It's *His* job to keep you faithful—full of faith, filled with faith that comes from Him. And if you don't have enough faith, all you have to do is read and listen to the Word. That's the source of faith. If you do that, He'll give you all the faith you need. Just keep reading the Word and trusting the Lord and don't worry.

¹ Ephesians 2:8

You don't have to have faith for tomorrow. You don't have to have faith for next week or next month, and certainly not for next year or many years from now. You don't have to have that faith *now*. You'll get it when the time comes. The only faith you need now is for today.

It's almost the end of the day and almost the end of the year, and you're still trying to do your best for the Lord. Do you still have faith? Then you're faithful. You made it through another year, so what were you worrying about? Before long, you will have made it through this day—another day of faithfulness—and then you can go to sleep and not worry about tomorrow. Rest in the Lord. “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on *His* faithfulness.”¹

You don't even have to have faith for a whole day. Just have faith for this *moment*—right now. Just have faith for one moment at a time! When you wake up in the morning, you don't need to worry, “Have I got faith for today?” Just get up and have faith for each little thing that you do throughout the day. That's all you have to have faith for. If faith no larger than a grain of mustard seed can move an entire mountain,² then it shouldn't even take a microscopic speck of faith to keep you doing all the things that you need to do in a day!

So don't worry about the future. Don't worry about tomorrow. Don't worry about even the next

¹ Psalm 37:3

² Matthew 17:20

hour. God will give you grace when the hour comes. He not only gives power for the hour, He gives power for the second or the split second—the instant! That’s all you need. The only faith you need is what you have right now, for right now.

“Be faithful until death,” Jesus says, “and I will give you the crown of life.”¹ You’re going to get a special crown, a shining crown, a crown that you can be proud of. Of course, you’re going to fall down before the Lord and cast your crowns before Him, like the 24 elders do in Revelation 4:10. Every time you start praising the Lord, you’re going to forget all about that crown and it’s going to tumble off at His feet. When you bow down and give Him the glory, you’ll cast your crown at His feet! But since the Lord gave it to you, you’d better pick it up again and wear it. Your crown will show what you have done for the Lord, and the Lord wants the world to see it! He wants everyone to see the badge of your faithfulness—a crown of life!

God bless and keep you faithful throughout the New Year and all the years to come, until you join Him in Heaven and receive your crown!

¹ Revelation 2:10

AFTERWORD

How can you know beyond a doubt that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, the way to salvation? The answer is simple: Try Him! Simply humble yourself and sincerely ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Ask Him to come into your heart, forgive you for your sins, and fill your life with His love, peace, and joy.

Jesus is real and He loves you. So much so that He suffered for your sins and died in your place so that you wouldn't have to, if you'll just receive Him and His forgiveness and His free gift of eternal life. But He can't save you unless you want Him to. His love is all-powerful, but He won't force His way into your life.

Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). He gently knocks at the door of your heart. He doesn't break it down or force His way in. He stands there meekly, lovingly, patiently, waiting for you to open your life and ask Him in.

Will you receive Him? If so, He will be your closest friend and companion, who will be with you always. He came for love and lived in love and died for love, that we might live and love forever!

You can receive Jesus into your heart right now by sincerely praying this simple prayer:

"Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all the wrongs I've done. I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. I open the door to my heart to You. Please come in, Jesus, and give me eternal life. Then help me to share Your love and truth with others. Amen."

God has promised to answer your prayer, so you are now His child. He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). He loves you that much!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Brandt Berg (1919–1994) was so committed to Jesus and Christian service that God was able to use him to start a worldwide Christian missionary movement.

Berg's parents were both active pastors and evangelists, and his early years were spent traveling with them in evangelistic work. Shortly after being drafted into the U.S. Army in 1941, he nearly died of double pneumonia. After determining to rededicate his life to Christian service, he experienced a miraculous healing.

For most of the next 27 years, he worked as a pastor and in various evangelistic endeavors until, in 1968, he received God's call to take the Gospel to the hippies of southern California. There he and his then teen-aged children began a ministry to the youth that grew and eventually became known as The Family. Today, members of The Family engage in missionary and humanitarian work in over 100 countries worldwide.

Berg called on his followers to devote their full time to spreading the message of Christ's love and salvation as far and wide as possible, unfettered by convention or tradition, and to teach others to do the same.

Berg also decried the de-Christianization and decay in moral values of Western society. He viewed the trend toward a New World Order as setting the stage for the rise of the Antichrist, a godless world dictator whom the Bible predicts will rule the world in the last days before Christ's return.

Berg's lively, down-to-earth and sometimes unconventional approach to heavenly matters makes his writings a unique contribution to Christian literature. He once said that the greatest thing one Christian can teach another is how to follow God and hear from Him fresh every day. Through his writings, he did just that.

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