

"THE POWER OF ENTHUSIASM"

INTRODUCTION There is a fire within you - an eternal flame - that never goes out, but which sometimes burns down to little more than a pilot light. It's always there...at your service...but you must stir it up and keep it burning in order to get the full benefit. It is the fire of enthusiasm, and it is the source of great power in a life.

I met a young minister not too long ago who told me about some of his early experiences in the Church. Fresh out of seminary, he was appointed to a little Church in northern Maine. One of his jobs was to see that the old furnace in the Church was stoked. Well, one Sunday morning he overslept and forgot to take care of the furnace. When he finally arrived there around ten o'clock, the Church was as cold as the zero weather outside. He said that he will never forget how the people shivered through the Sunday morning service. I guess I had been telling him about some of the hot, humid Sundays in a NYC Church. That's how it came about... the fire went out.

Anyway, are there times when you forget to "fire up" the furnace of enthusiasm in the morning? Without this fire, this power, you may look upon the rest of the day with apathy, with boredom, with despair.

ILLUSTRATION The power of enthusiasm. In 1864, the Civil War had been raging for three long years. The Union Troops had gone down the Shenandoah Valley and had been met with a surprise setback by the Confederate General, Jubal Early, who had rolled them back in chaos and confusion. Then there came riding out of Winchester, on a big white horse, a man with a great head of long, black hair, carrying a pennant with the two stars of a Union General.

It was Philip Sheridan. He rode down the road at top speed, crying "I am here. Turn about. We shall gain victory. Let us go forward. Save the Union". Men, they say, threw their caps in the air, cried like babies, embraced one another and cried, "Sheridan is here!" By nightfall, they had captured the entire valley. One man had turned thousands. One man who had stirred his inner fire of enthusiasm.

DEVELOPMENT Enthusiasm is the invincible power that laughs at failure, and carries joy with it wherever it goes. It is the greatest asset in the world. It beats money, power and influence. Emerson once remarked,

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm".

No one can see enthusiasm. It cannot be measured. Yet, we can feel the results of it - the sparkling eye, the light step, the cheerful voice, the lifting power, changing situation, the resulting success. The enthusiastic salesman turns in signed order; the enthusiastic inventor builds a new engine of greater efficiency; the enthusiastic lover of flowers produces a new specimen. But without it...

This word "enthusiasm" is derived from "en" and "theos" which together means "full of God". You could say enthusiasm means "on fire with God". I like to think we're born with this in our nature and then when we lose our enthusiasm, we are only half-living, and thus, in a way we realize only half the fruits of life. So many people die with all of their music in them...with all their greatness bottled up...never set free. It's one of life's tragic wastes.

HOW CAN I HAVE ENTHUSIASM

Now, perhaps you feel that you have great problems: that you're overcome with worry; that you don't feel well; that you've got a rough week ahead....and you may be saying to yourself, "I wish I could muster up a bit of enthusiasm...how does one get it, or let's say - how does one develop it?"

We tend to think that the God qualities of zest and enthusiasm...of joy and love...that these are the effects of, or the results of a happy life. It's not that way. The truth is that we must first give thanks, and then the blessings manifest. You must love, and then you will be loved. You must cultivate the spirit of joy and then joyous circumstances, I believe, will flow your way.

Enthusiasm must come first. When you are enthusiastic about the good things that happen in life, you are simply responding to life emotionally. But real enthusiasm is not a response - it is a cause. When you develop the ability to be enthusiastic about everything, you'll get into the surging, flowing, revitalizing tide of life....that moves, that lifts.

WAITING ON THE LORD

To me, one of the most profound statements in the Bible is that word from Isaiah that Barbara Hairston read earlier.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew
their strength.... (think about it..)
They shall mount up with wings as eagles;
They shall run and not be weary;
They shall walk and not faint."

There's the key. The tendency of most of us is to do a lot of waiting in everyday life...waiting for everything from subways to buses to people to repairmen, delivery boys...to the weather to change. Let's face it, in this city, we wait on just about everything but the Lord.

We invest our power in things that were never meant to have power over us. We make tyrants of the telephone, the TV, the typewriter, the clock, the calendar. To really "wait on the Lord" is simply to affirm and to act as if you believed that you were a child of God, that God lives, that He moves and has being in you. When you "wait" in this manner, you can't help but develop the power of enthusiasm, to firing up the furnace of that quality.

In this sense, "waiting" on the Lord can be the most practical, positive and dynamic thing you do in your life. A young business man told me this past week, "I feel better for going to Church....for having that hour to see life, feel life from higher ground....it lifts and sets me for the week ahead."

"Waiting on the Lord" can make a difference...the difference between life and death. This was true for a young navy seaman named Williams Toles of Rochester, Michigan. In 1949 he was washed overboard without a life jacket when his ship was many miles off the coast of Africa. He was many miles away from the regular sea lanes followed by commercial shipping, so there was seemingly no hope, nothing to do but drown. But Seaman Toles believed in the power of prayer. For eleven hours, he kept himself afloat in choppy water, waiting to be rescued and praying all the while. After an almost superhuman effort, he was rescued by an American Export Lines freighter whose captain had

been unaccountably impelled to divert the course of his vessel. Coincidence? Some will say "yes"... "that's all...luck". As a believer, I find that too many things happen in life to bring it all down to ~~explained~~ sheer "coincidence". Thread a divine activity runs through this universe.

ENTHUSIASM Remember, you are born with enthusiasm. It is God's gift of His continued presence and power, nourished and nurtured through moments of "waiting on the Lord".

Our awareness of this power helps us to focus all of our energies and points them toward the accomplishment of the things we are working on. You could say that one who lacks enthusiasm is like a house "divided against itself". His powers and abilities do not pull together. When you have enthusiasm, you are so keenly intent on the thing to be done that your ability, your love, your faith, your energy, your wishes all unite to do it.

Enthusiasm that is born of a deep faith and an abiding trust in God - in His universe, in His disclosure of Himself in the person of Christ, in prayer - is contagious. It can move people and mountains. Believing with Paul that "all things work together for good to them that love God", let each affirm in his heart that hour:

"I am alive...awake...alert...joyous
and enthusiastic about life.

All things are possible to him who
believes".

If the Christian can't say this, then the world is in trouble.

PRAYER Grant us, O God, the fire of enthusiasm...fill each of us with your spirit. May others feel it and sense it. Let the bread and the wine remind us of the life and teaching of Christ, in whom we find a revelation of yourself in human terms. In His name and spirit, we pray. Amen