

## A QUEST FOR SOULS

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### THE THREEFOLD SECRET OF A GREAT LIFE

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Text: **"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 3:13, 14).

Somebody has well said that "the proper study of mankind is man." The study of biography, therefore, is always a most fascinating and helpful study. Everybody who is normal is interested keenly in the lives of people who have succeeded. We would know all that we may about them, about their beginnings, their struggles, their habits, about their viewpoint in life. This morning I would direct your attention for a little while to the most remarkable Christian of the centuries, namely, the Apostle Paul. He was, and is, the greatest single credential that CHRIST's Gospel has ever produced. One day, in writing to his favorite church, the Philippian church, in a burst of confidence, it would seem, he lets us into the secret of his marvelous life, and we are to study that threefold secret for a little while this morning. Mark his words:

**"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD in Christ Jesus."**

In those words, this greatest of all Christians states the three-fold secret of his incomparable life, and we will do well to look at that threefold secret today.

The first element in it is the element of whole-hearted concentration. **"This one thing I do"** - not a dozen things, not even two things, but **"this one thing I do."**

No life can be very great, or very happy, or very useful, without this element of concentration. Everyone should have a work to do, and know what it is, and do it with all his might. Decision is energy, and energy is power, and power is confidence, and confidence to a remarkable degree

contributes to success. Many a man in life has failed, not from lack of ability, but from lack of this element of concentration. The whole world is witness to its power.

Turn to any realm that you will, and the vital meaning of concentration stands out in all human life, after the most striking fashion. Take the business world, and the element of concentration there is of prime importance, if success is to be achieved. The very watchwords in the business world magnify this element of concentration. They talk to us about specialization and consolidation, and incorporation, and on and on, giving emphasis in all such words to the meaningful quality of concentration.

A short time ago one of the world's most successful businessmen was waited upon by a group of young men, who sought his counsel about how to succeed, and he gave them this laconic advice: "Young gentlemen, get all your eggs into one basket, and then watch that basket."

It was his way of giving emphasis to the tremendous value of concentration. The day for the jack-of-all-trades has passed. A man must do one thing and do it with all his might. The professional man understands that. The lawyer who is minded to reach the topmost rung of his high calling sets himself with all diligence and devotedness to that calling, and does not dissipate his energies on a half dozen other callings, as in the other days men sometimes did.

The physician understands that. The day of the specialist has come. The teacher understands that. In all the world about us men understand that this winning element, stated by Paul as the first element, humanly speaking, of his marvelous career, is indispensable to success, namely, the power of concentration - **"this one thing I do."**

And when we turn to the world of science, and look at the notable scientists, that truth of concentration seems to be written in their lives as with letters of living fire. Edison with all devotedness concentrates his energies in the realm of electricity, and is constantly surprising the world by his marvelous discoveries. And the Wright brothers, with all their devotedness, gave themselves to the mastery of the secrets of the air, and constantly surprised us by their revelations.

When we come to the highest realm of all - the realm religious - this element of concentration there holds sway just as in these other realms. No man can serve two masters. One must be our master, and JESUS stands above all mankind and says: "If you would be my disciple, then I tell you I must come first. I must come before father or mother, or the dearest loved one of your life. I must come before your own business, or your own property. I must come before your own life. I must be Lord of all, or I will not be Lord at all."

Now, you would not trust your soul's eternal welfare to a proffered Saviour who would ask or allow anything less than that He should be first. **"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me all your heart."** I care not what may be a man's difficulties or doubts in the world religious, if only such man, with definiteness of purpose, with whole-heartedness of aim, shall set himself to seek GOD's light and leading, I know that he will find Him. 'In the day that you seek me with your whole heart, **"I will be found of you."**

Many a Christian man follows Christ afar off, and limps and grovels in the Christian life,

because he is seeking to adjust himself in life to giving CHRIST some secondary place, and CHRIST will not have it. Concentration is a prime requisite in the victorious life anywhere.

In the second place the great Christian leads us to the consideration of a second secret explanatory of his marvelous career, and that is that he cultivated a wise forgetfulness of the past. It rings like a trumpet blast in this Bible that we are to remember certain things that we ought to remember. That word "remember" rings out like a bugle blast, again and again in the Bible. But along with the factor of wisely remembering there is to go that other important factor of wisely forgetting. Many a man goes hobbled and crippled through life and never does come to the highest and best, because he cannot forget certain things that ought to be forgotten by him.

And what are some of the things that we ought every one to forget? Let me run over a brief list. We ought everyone to learn how practically to forget our blunders. What blunderers we all are, and how many blunders we all make. Every man must learn how to forget his own blunders, or he will go manacled and crippled to his grave. The old saying comes in point right clearly, that "the best of men are but men at the best." We are to learn, therefore, how to forget our blunders. Ebenezer was a field of defeat before it rang with the songs of victory. We are to learn how to take our very blunders and make them bridges over which we shall span the chasms and go to better days.

And what else are we to learn how to forget? We are to learn how to forget our losses. In human life losses of all kinds come more or less in our experiences. We are to learn how to get past them, and practically to forget them. I have observed no more painfully tragical sight than a strong, alert man, down in spirit, singing his dirges and chanting his jeremiads because he had lost some property. I am thinking now of a man whose property burned up a day or two after the insurance had expired, and all was a total loss, and there he was without property at all, in the gray of that early morning, and with his face in his hands he kept chanting the pitiful cry: "I have lost all!" Presently his tiny little girl, of four or five summers, came to him, all puzzled, and said: "Why, no, papa, you have not lost all. You have me and mamma left!"

And it took that to summon him and to hearten him and to bring him back to sobriety and to right-thinking. No man is to whine and mope and go down because losses come here and there and yonder. But, he is to learn how to get past them and to forget them.

What else are we to forget? We are to learn how to forget life's injuries. It would seem that in this world of ours with its rivalries and competitions and frictions and alienations, it is difficult to get past the injuries that come in human life. And yet I tell you, my brother men, if for any cause you are cherishing hate in your heart, then you have lost the highest perspective of life, and cannot have the highest perspective of life as long as the poison of hate is allowed in your heart and in your life.

A man is terribly hindered and has around him a ball and a chain, if in his heart he cherishes something that says: "I wilt lie awake at nights, and I wilt turn many a corner, and I wilt await my day, to get even with some man for some cruel dart that he throws at me." Big men do not hate. Big men do not cherish resentments. Big men put them down and out, and go their way, and refuse to harbor them. They refuse to let them rankle like poisons in the heart, thus to vitiate every high thing that the spirit should hold most dear.

What else are we to forget? We are to learn how to forget our successes. More men have been spoiled by success than you and I can begin to measure. There is danger in success, anywhere, for any man. If a man can bear success, he can bear anything. Easier far can the human spirit bear adversity than it can bear prosperity. It is better any day to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for in the house of feasting the human spirit is lifted up, and pride always goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit always goes before a fall.

When Uzziah of old came to his day of remarkable prosperity, then it was that the Bible tells us his heart was lifted up to destruction. The history of the rich American family stands out like a mountain range, that every third generation of such family goes to defeat and failure and poverty.

- The first generation wins success,
- The second generation spends it,
- The third generation goes the downward way to poverty and failure.

We are to learn how to forget our successes. If a man does not learn what success is for - any kind of success, financial success, political success, social success, intellectual success, any kind of success - if he does not learn what it is for, the day comes for his undoing and his downfall and his defeat.

What else are we to forget? We are to learn how to forget our sorrows - and sooner or later these sorrows come to us, each and all. We are to learn how to forget them. When the sorrows come, we are to learn how to take these sorrows to the great, refining, overruling Master, and ask Him so to dispose, so to rule and overrule in them and with them that we may come out of them all refined and disciplined, the better educated and more useful, because of such sorrows. They tell us that when you break the oyster's shell at a certain place it will go somewhere into the deep and find a pearl and mend that broken place in its shell with a beautiful pearl.

Even so, when your sorrow in life comes, you are to learn how to take that sorrow, and so have it woven into the warp and woof of your life that you shall not be weaker and worse for the sorrow, but shall be richer and stronger and better, because of such sorrow.

Read every now and then the polished essay of Emerson on "*Compensation*." Running all through this world is that clear principle of compensation. The Bible recognizes it: "**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**" We are to lay to heart that sublimest truth that "**all things work together for good to them that love God.**" Yonder in the asylum for the deaf and dumb a visitor went one day, and the superintendent of the asylum said: "Let me show you how bright these little children are, even though they are deaf and dumb. Ask any question you will," said the superintendent to the visitor. "Write your question there on the board, and see the answers that these little mutes will give to your question." He asked question after question, did this visitor. After awhile he asked a cruel question. I wonder how he could have done it. He wrote this cruel question there on the board: "if GOD loved you, why did He make you deaf and dumb?"

Then the little things bowed their shoulders and sobbed for a moment with almost uncontrollable emotion, and presently a little tiny girl came from out her seat there, and went to the blackboard, and wrote under that question these wonderful words of JESUS: "**Even so, Father; for so it**

**seemed good in thy sight."**

Wasn't it glorious? You and I are to take our sorrows, our black Fridays, our lone and long nights, and we are to come to Him and say: "Manage thou these, thou wondrous Friend, who canst turn the very night into morning; manage these for me." And we are to sing with Whittier, when he sang:

"I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
But this I know, I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care."

What else are we to forget? We are to learn how to forget our sins. If Paul had not learned how to forget his sins he would have been crippled utterly clear to his death.

- Paul consented to the death of Stephen.
- Paul persecuted the church.
- Paul was a ring-leader in sin.
- Paul seemed to run the whole gamut of sin.

He called himself the chief of sinners, and perhaps he was. If Paul had not learned how to forget those awful sins that mastered him back yonder, if he had not learned how to get past them, then he would have gone with accusing conscience and broken spirit clear to his grave.

We shall have about us a ball and a chain, and shall go groveling and despairing and defeated, if we do not learn how to forget our sins. When we look at the debit side of our life, do our hearts faint within us? Mine faints within me. But then the Master of life summons me and says: "Come over here and look at the credit side, and the credit side will outfigure all that debit side." And when I come over there I say to Him: "What dost thou mean, oh, thou gracious Friend?" Listen to Him, and He tells us: "**Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.**"

Listen to Him again: "**As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.**" And listen to Him yet again: "I have put your sins behind my back. I have drowned them in the depths of the sea. I will remember them against you no more forever." Oh, isn't that wonderful? Listen to Him again and He tells us: "**The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.**"

When Satan comes with his accusing cry, reminding me of my weakness and my frailty and my transgressions and my proneness to sin and all that, he can make out his case, I grant it, but I come back and say to him: "But, sir, where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded, and in CHRIST, whose name is JESUS, I have victory, even over my sins." "**Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.**"

We have a real Saviour from sin in CHRIST JESUS, and when we trust Him, no more are we to go hobbled, with ball and chain, because of sin, because CHRIST becomes our personal Saviour from both the penalty and power of sin.

Years ago, in South Texas, there was a little home in the country burned down, and before the

neighbors could rescue the family all were burned to death save one little girl, some nine or ten years of age, and she was badly burned on one side of her face and little body. The rest were all burned to death. The neighbors, after a few days, when they had consulted, sent little Mary to the far-famed Buckner Orphans Home. They advised the noble head of that home when little Mary would come, on what train, and there good Dr. Buckner was waiting for her, of course. When she got off the train, his little eyes were red from weeping, and she seemed intuitively to know that he was her protector henceforth, and she started toward him saying: "Is this Mr. Buckner?" He said: "Yes, and is this little Mary?"

And then she came and laid her little head up against his knee, and sobbed with indescribable emotion, and looked up at last with that little burned face and said: "You will have to be my papa and mamma both."

He said: "I will, the best I can, Mary," And then she went into the Home, and was looked after along with those hundreds of children, I have been there time and again and preached to them, and I have seen them come out to greet him when he would return to them, after an absence, The little tots come down the avenue, and vie with one another as they swing around him, each wishing to kiss him first.

Along in that group one day came the little burned-faced Mary, and the little children kissed him as was their wont, but little Mary stood off, several feet away, and looked across her shoulder, watching the whole affair, sobbing like her heart would break. And when these little ones had kissed the good man, he looked across to her and said: "Mary, why don't you come and kiss me?" That was entirely too much for her and she sobbed aloud, and then he went over and touched her little chin and lifted it up and said: I do not quite understand you, Mary. Why didn't you come to kiss me?"

And the little thing had difficulty in speaking, and when she did speak she said: "O Papa Buckner, I could not ask you to kiss me, I am so ugly. After I got burned I am so ugly I could not ask you to kiss me, but if you will just love me like you love the other children and tell me you love me, then you need not kiss me at all." You know what he did. He pushed all those beautiful children away, and took up little Mary in his arms, and kissed the little burned cheek again and again and said: "Mary, you are just as beautiful to Papa Buckner as are any of the rest."

Ah, me! I was that burned child once, and sin did it all! I came to JESUS and said: "I am sorry. My heart is sick about it. Oh, I have repented of it all." And He said: "I will receive you, and I will give you the kiss of reconciliation, the kiss of pardon, the kiss of forgiveness," and I was saved when I came like that. Now no more will I go fettered and bound because of sin, because CHRIST has made me free by His mighty grace.

JESUS paid it all,  
All to Him I owe,  
Sin had left its crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

Let me detain you for the third word, Paul had a right anticipation, "**Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**" Paul had a right forward

look. My men and women, at this busy noonday hour, I come to ask you, one by one, have you the right aim in your life?

What are you living for?

What is that hand for? What is the eye for? What is human life for? What is your life for? How are you using your life? How are you investing your life? What is the aim of your life? Does somebody say: "Why, I am taking it one world at a time?"

That is not bright. That is not clever. If a man does not include two worlds at a time, then he commits suicide for both. A man is to be a citizen of two worlds, and a man who lives simply for this world, no matter how successfully, how victoriously, how notoriously, if a man lives simply for this present world, he commits suicide in it and suicide for the world endless that awaits us just out there. Oh, include two worlds in your plan!

Let me tell you about three men. One said: "One world at a time for me," and from early morning until dewy eve, he invested all his powers to win success, and he won it, but he died without hope, and without GOD, taking a leap into the dark with a wail, the memory of which must forever give agony to the hearts that heard it.

The second one made profession of religion, but he followed CHRIST afar off. He put his religion into a little tiny corner of his life, He gave JESUS the small places, and when he came to the last end, with his family and minister around him, the minister was saddened by his awful story: "Sir, I trust I shall get to Heaven, but my works are burned up, because I have done little or nothing for CHRIST. Oh, if I could retrace my life and be the right kind of man!"

And then there was the third man. From life's young morning he dedicated his life to JESUS. He went his way a great business man, but with it all he was the faithful friend of JESUS. He chose CHRIST as his chief partner, his guide in all things. And when he came down to die, there was a halo of light about his face, and there was victory in his heart and in his words, and all the men that knew him said: "If ever a Christian has lived, this man is he." Which one of these three men would you rather be?

Listen to the words of a modern poet:

I had walked life's way with an easy tread,  
Had followed where comforts and pleasure led,  
Until one day in a quiet place  
I met the Master face to face.

With station and rank and wealth for my goal,  
Much thought for my body, but none for my soul,  
I had entered to win in life's mad race,  
When I met the Master face to face.

I had built my castles and reared them high,  
With their towers had pierced the blue of the sky,  
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace,

When I met the Master face to face.

I met Him and knew Him and blushed to see  
That His eyes, full of sorrow, were fixed on me;  
And I faltered and fell at His feet that day,  
While my castles melted and vanished away.

Melted and vanished and in their place  
Naught else did I see but the Master's face.  
And I cried aloud, "Oh, make me meet  
To follow the steps of Thy wounded feet."

My thought is now for the souls of men,  
I have lost my life to find it again,  
E'er since one day in a quiet place  
I met the Master face to face.

O my men and women, you are not ready to die, you are not ready to live, you are not ready for any duty, even for five seconds, if you are putting the wisdom and love and power of CHRIST out of your life. Be wise, I summon you, and give heed to the supreme things, even in the day when you ought. That day is to-day.

#### **THE BENEDICTION**

And now, as we go, may GOD vouchsafe unto us every one, His own searching truth, applied by its Divine Author, even by the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, so that we shall from this day forward, put first things first, in the remaining life allowed us in the flesh. Oh, we beseech thee, our Father, that these busy men and women at this noontide hour, may go away with the heart inflexibly fixed to give CHRIST, the one Saviour, the rightful Master of mankind, absolute supremacy in our every heart, and in every life, and in every life plan that we are to have from this day forward.

And as you go now, may the blessing of GOD, bright like the light when the morning dawneth, and gracious as the dew when the eventide cometh, be granted you all and each, to abide with you today and tomorrow, and throughout GOD's vast beyond, forever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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