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WOMEN IN CHURCH

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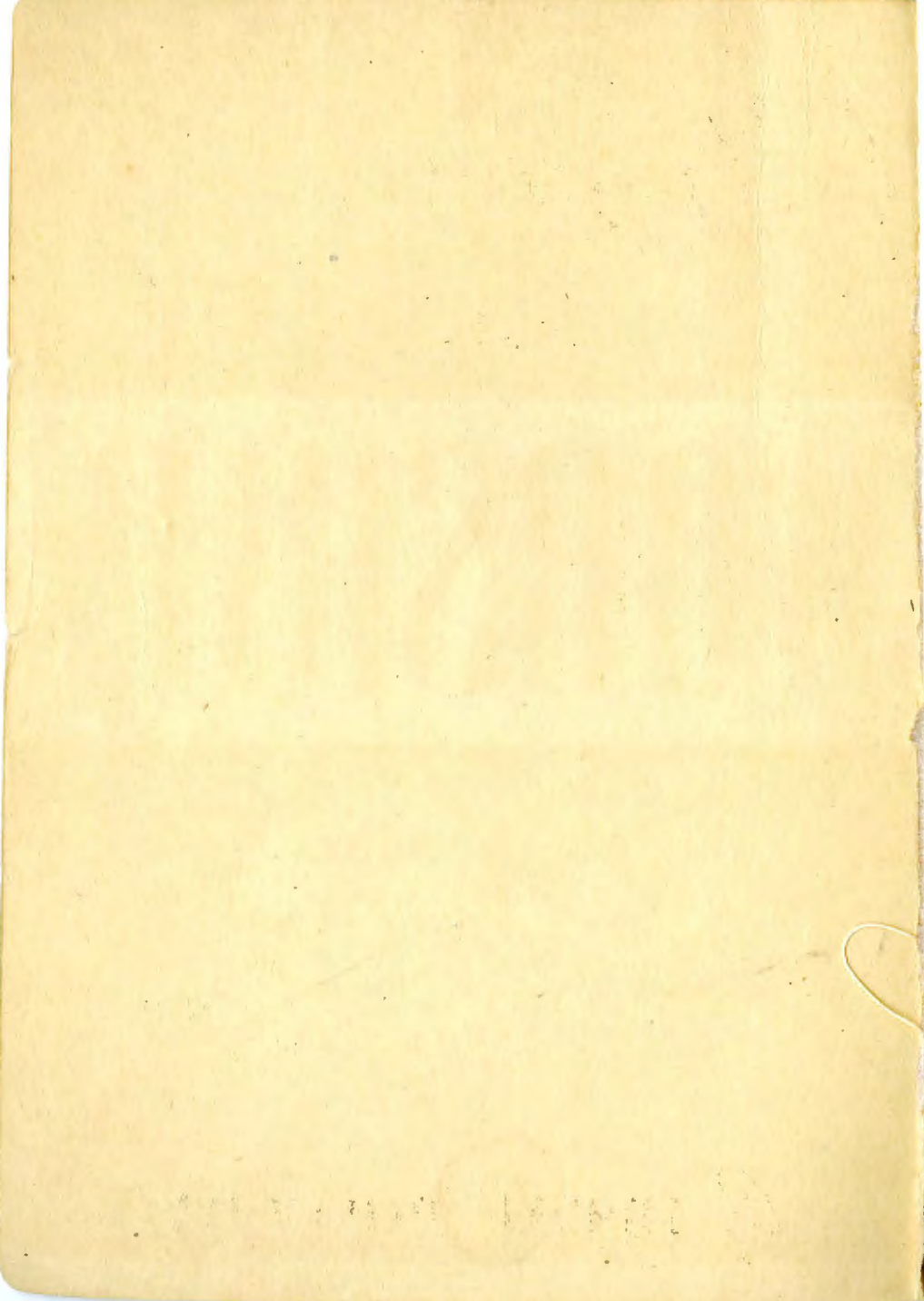
*Women
at*

WORSHIP



17
DEVOTIONAL
TALKS

By FRANKIE OLIVER IVY



WOMEN AT WORSHIP

*More Devotional Talks for
Women's Organizations*

... BY ...

FRANKIE OLIVER IVY



THE STANDARD PUBLISHING COMPANY
CINCINNATI, OHIO, U.S.A.

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FOREWORD

Nearly all women belong to some club or organization these days, and most of them have at one time or another been asked to give a devotional at some meeting. One has only to ask any program chairman to know how few people are willing to attempt this part of the program and how few people give it acceptably. People seem to feel ill prepared to give these brief talks. Perhaps they are.

The arranging of devotional talks is not so difficult, but it does take time and some knowledge of the Bible. This small volume and its predecessors have been carefully prepared to help inexperienced and certainly busy people. The devotionals are what might be called custom built, ready made and ready for use. Care has been taken in estimating the time required for each devotional; but as some people read and speak more rapidly than others, if one wishes to be very exact, it is wise to time each devotional used.

The public has been very generous in praise of the two volumes which have gone before, and as a result certain suggestions and requests have

come to the author. One has been a request for help in training people to prepare their own devotionals and to shape that part of their programs. Another has been the suggestion that helpful hints as to the delivery of devotionals be included for those who, because of lack of training in public speaking, feel ill prepared to give them even when they are ready made.

The following pages have been prepared in answer to these suggestions and demands. It is sincerely hoped that they may prove helpful.

FRANKIE OLIVER IVY.

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TALK I

THE PRAYER PERFECT

Richard Lewellyn, in his magnificent book, "How Green Was My Valley," makes one of his characters say that prayer is profound thinking. This is true. Prayer is the expression of earnest, intense thinking. Many of the most devout and fervent prayers never reach expression in words. There are good prayers and bad prayers, according to the hearts from which they arise.

Jesus, being perfect, prayed the perfect prayer. From childhood we have been familiar with its words. Indeed, it is to be feared that the Lord's Prayer has become more of a feat of memory than a conscious exercise of devotion. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, do we actually realize what we are saying?

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Let us study the parts of this prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven"—do we recognize those words as a confession of faith? In them are expressed the universal creed of all Christianity. Those words are a confession of faith in a God who is a heavenly Father, and not a demon god. By those six words we imply acknowledgment of God as Guardian, Mentor, Protector, as the Author of our being and the Deity to whose paternal tenderness we appeal. We characterize *our* God.

A little boy once said to his mother that the Lord's Prayer was like a letter to God. "It begins, 'Dear Father,' just like a letter," he said. A great many people accept those opening words in much the same way, missing their deeper significance. There is something especially intimate and tender about the relationship between a father and his children. There is mutual affection. There are forbearance, tolerance and gentle, protecting care from the father. There is understanding of the frailties of the child. There are trust, love and dependence on the part of the child.

Acknowledging God as "*our* Father"—not "*my* Father"—is subscribing to the universal brotherhood of man. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). In His teachings Jesus always

strove to use familiar illustrations. Who is not familiar with the relationship existing between father and child? Hence, Jesus taught us to pray to "our Father."

When we repeat "which art in heaven," we acknowledge our belief in a realm outside the material world; a place where God may always be found by those who call upon Him.

In the next four words, "Hallowed be thy name," are implied reverence and respect for God.

Continuing the affirmation of faith are the words, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." They imply belief in a godly estate and express a yearning for its establishment on earth. They acknowledge God's will to be perfect and admit our willingness and desire to be submissive to God's will. The words, "in earth, as it is in heaven," further affirm our belief in a heaven that is perfect because God's will is done there. We set heaven up as the ultimate to be desired.

In giving us the perfect prayer, Jesus clearly showed that in prayer, as in life, spiritual things come first. In the perfect prayer and the perfect life, acceptance and acknowledgment of God and the according to Him of love, respect and reverence must come first. Without this attitude towards God all praying would be pointless. After we have made confession of our faith, it follows

that our first desire is for the establishment of God's own way of life; the working of His will even as it works in heaven. Jesus Himself said, "Seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Luke 12:31).

Having shown us first how to pray for spiritual things, Jesus then made mention of the most important physical things. First, food. "Give us this day our daily bread." Note that bread is used. Bread is the symbol of plain living. In it are implied those things that are essential. There is no mention made of cake, the symbol of luxury. There is great trust implied in the phrasing. "Daily bread" does not imply a reserve accumulation, but only the wish and trust that each day God can and will supply our necessities. We may accumulate our own reserves and luxuries, but only God, by His grace and power, can provide the basic elements of life in a continuous daily flow. Man cultivates the soil, plants the seed and reaps the harvest; but if God withholds rain and sun, all man's labor is vain. However, we must not think of the word "bread" used in the Lord's Prayer as meaning food alone. Jesus said, "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). Many a stomach is well filled while the heart is empty. Human beings pass their thoughts along to each other. They inspire, com-

fort and sympathize with each other; but the impulse which sets these feelings in motion comes from God. He is the Provider of all spiritual and physical food.

"Forgive us our debts." Who, having erred, does not desire to be forgiven and escape the consequences of his error? Even hardened criminals, in spite of their bravado, seek to be absolved by society. The words about forgiveness which Jesus prayed are at once an acknowledgment of our common frailty and of God's power to absolve. The qualifying phrase, "as we forgive our debtors," reminds us that we, too, have an obligation to forgive. By thus qualifying our supplication for forgiveness we assert our acceptance of our responsibility and our willingness to abide by the judgments of God and to live by His mercy and love.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Those words are not only a petition for God's care and protection; they are another implied declaration of faith in God's power to preserve and protect, an acknowledgment and acceptance of His guidance. Those words are like the theme melody in a beautiful musical composition, an exalted recurrence of the melody of faith.

In the same exalted strain with which the prayer perfect begins it closes: "For thine is the

kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." That is another way of saying, "All things come of Thee. Without Thee we are nothing. All worship, all praise, belong to Thee."

We often hear it said of a person, "He is many things to many people." The Lord's Prayer is all things to all people. It is an affirmation of faith in a loving paternal Deity. It is a pledge of submission to the perfect will, the highest dictates of our spirits. It is a confession of sin, a petition for absolution, a testimony to our belief that God's justice is seasoned with mercy. It is a plea for the essentials of life. It is a request for protection and guidance. It is a statement of our willingness to give credit where credit is due—to God.

In all verity, the prayer perfect which Jesus taught us is a model for all other prayers. It covers all our needs, expresses all our loyalties and all our aspirations. Truly it is all things to all men.

Prayer

Slowly, fervently and thoughtfully the Lord's Prayer should be prayed in unison.

Before or after this devotional the use of Stevenson's arrangement of James Whitcomb Riley's poem, "The Prayer Perfect," is effective. The singing of the "Doxology" imme-

diately after the unison prayer, without pause or announcement, is also effective. Suggested hymns: "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "Father, to Us Thy Children," "Father, in Need of Thee, I Pray," "Did You Think to Pray?" "Father, We Thank Thee," "Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer."

TALK II

FAITH AND COURAGE

Read the following story based on the second chapter of Joshua:

Before commanding the Israelites to pass over the Jordan into the promised land, Joshua sent out spies, telling them to go view Jericho. They lodged at the house of a harlot named Rahab.

The king of Jericho was informed that there were two men hidden in Rahab's house, so he sent officers there. They told her to bring forth the men, that they were spies. Rahab answered that the men had left the city at the time that the gates were shut, and she suggested that the officers pursue them.

Rahab had hidden the two spies with stalks of flax on the roof of her house. She said to them, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land." She also confessed that she believed their God was the true God. Then Rahab asked, since she had dealt kindly with them, that they deal kindly with her father's house.

The men promised that when the Israelites came to take the land, Rahab's family would be saved. They told her to gather her father's household into her house and to fasten a line of scarlet thread in the window to identify her house. They said that no harm would come to any member of her family.

Rahab sent the men away and hung the red thread in the window, as they had told her.

When the Israelites entered the city and destroyed it, Joshua fulfilled the spies' promise and saved Rahab and her entire household alive.

Rahab, a harlot, a dishonored woman, was not an important nor influential person and probably not an educated one. She was intelligent enough, though, to realize that Jehovah was the true God. After she had been convinced that the idols which her own nation worshiped were false, she was brave enough to risk royal displeasure to further Jehovah's plans. As is so often the case with people who think for themselves and act upon their honest convictions, she was brave enough and clever enough to think of a way to turn her protection of the spies to personal account, and she was unselfish enough to turn the obligation they owed her to the benefit of her family. For herself, she asked nothing, but sought immunity for her kindred. Joshua

granted her immunity also, and she was adopted by the Israelites.

Braving governmental displeasure, be it royal or not, is always to take a serious risk. The faith which prompted Rahab to take this risk is as priceless as her unselfishness. Her unselfishness and faith are as pearls strung upon the scarlet thread of her courage.

The scarlet thread Rahab hung in her window was the badge of her unselfish courage and of her faith. That same slender scarlet thread still runs through the world today. It is the badge of all those whose reliance in Jehovah prompts them to unselfish heroism. Their name is legion. Every day the newspapers record some story of unselfish heroism. A mother rescues her child from a flaming bedroom, counting her own risk as naught and relying on God to see her through. A man places his wife and children in a lifeboat and takes his chances in an angry sea. A soldier rescues a comrade. A boy pulls a chum from the swimming hole just in time. Human love, strengthened by faith, is the source of all courage. From the wellspring of faith flows an unending thread of unselfishness and courage.

There are so many kinds of courage, so many shades of scarlet. There is purely physical courage which prompts men to do and dare. There

is mental courage which enables men to think independently and to hold steadfastly to their convictions, even though they endorse a minority opinion or ideology. Expression of these convictions often calls for fresh supplies of courage. Sometimes this sort of courage also involves physical courage. This is active courage, but there is also passive courage. It is the latter which enables the ailing and maimed to endure and the distressed to bear their burdens. Every sort of courage has its source in faith in some resource beyond our own.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, . . . When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. . . . I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. (Ps. 27: 1, 3, 4, 10, 13.)

What a declaration of fearless trust in God David penned in those lines! What a document of human courage undergirded by faith!

To have the courage to follow Moses out of Egypt the Israelites had first to have the faith to believe that the Lord was sending them deliverance. To cross the sea on dry land they had first to believe that God would keep the waves

rolled back. The same brand of faith caused them to believe that the walls of Jericho would fall down. Gideon and his three hundred had it when he and his men went out to conquer thousands with their trumpet blasts and with their torches concealed in pitchers. Similar faith-grounded courage prompted Deborah to counsel Barak to oppose Sisera's huge army. Lack of faith made Barak fearful. Deborah bulwarked his faith with her own and his flagging courage with her presence. Celebrating the victory, she sang, "The very stars from their courses fought against Sisera."

It took the same sort of active courage to prompt Peter to cut off the Roman soldier's ear in Gethsemane, but it took the quieter, passive courage to take Peter's Lord and ours to the cross.

Peter's courage sprang from love of Christ and faith in Him and His teachings. Christ's courage was rooted in trust in God and loving faith in mankind. He believed that those for whom He was laying down His life were worthy of the sacrifice.

We who have accepted this sacrifice and its benefits should certainly have the courage to justify His faith in us by living the sort of lives He wants us to live. Rahab demonstrated the strength

of her faith before she asked to participate in its benefits. God does not ask this of us. All Jesus ever asked of any one was to follow Him. Our part is to demonstrate to the world that His way is the best and happiest way, a thoroughly practical, workable way of life. By our lives we must prove to those who accuse Christianity of being impotent, unworkable and a failure, that it is mere sophistry to contend that a way of life which has never been universally tried is a failure.

War, like prolonged illness and suffering, is so dreadful an experience that it saps courage and undermines the faith of some people; yet out of Israel's recurrent wars came strengthened and renewed faith. Perhaps that is why God permits wars to recur. A soldier, returning from the Pacific war zone, made this statement: "There are no atheists in fox holes." A young aviator entitled his book, "God Is My Co-pilot." If out of such a holocaust there can come such sentiments, perhaps the sacrifices are not made in vain. Perhaps humanity is now ready to move up another step on the Jesus road. Certainly in the midst of embattled days the scarlet thread of active courage grows strong and thick as a cable.

Passive courage is a more difficult sort because it is a more personal thing. It is easier to be courageous when others near by are being cour-

ageous, too. The griefs and pains we bear alone are all the more Christlike because we endure them in solitude. Christ's sacrifice was a solitary sacrifice.

Many who act and endure courageously do not admit to any great degree of religious faith; but consciously or not, our courage springs from trust in a Power that can take over when our own strength is spent and faltering. We must trust in a God who can add protection to love and augment our endurance when we have expended our own courage.

Whether we display the scarlet thread outside our windows or only wear it in our hearts, it still runs through the countless generations of men—faith-girded courage.

Women who have entrusted to them the first instruction of the race have the opportunity of seeing that the scarlet thread is never broken. Instruct your sons and daughters in the ways of peaceful, Christlike living, both by precept and by example. Teach them to put their trust in the Lord and keep the Christian way a living, forceful world force. Help bear the scarlet thread through the ages until "all flesh shall see it together" and "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." It may seem to take a long time, but trees of tough fibers which weather the storms are of slow

growth so that their roots may be strong and go deep.

Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper (2 Chron. 20: 20).

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith (Col. 2: 6, 7).

Prayer

Grant us, O God, steadfast hearts which no unworthy cowardice may drag from its anchorage of faith in Thee and Thy great and loving power. Reveal unto us Thy good purposes and increase in us understanding of Thy teachings. Give us greater diligence to know Thy will and give us strength and courage that we, knowing it, may stand fast in Thy precepts. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," "Dare to Be a Daniel," "The Church of God Is Stablished," "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun," "Trust and Obey," "We're Marching to Zion," "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "O Zion, Haste."

TALK III

POLLUTED STREAMS

Traveling by motor through the mountains one passes innumerable streams. Some of them are marked, "Impure Water." There is always danger where the water is polluted.

In some states there are laws forbidding industrial plants from polluting streams. There are, however, as yet few laws forbidding the pollution of the stream of consciousness—the mind. Both child and adult are exposed to mental pollution. Obviously, keeping the juvenile mind pure is the more important. The juvenile of today is the adult of tomorrow.

The safeguarding of childhood is the business of every woman, whether or not she be a mother. It is only that mothers have a greater opportunity, a larger responsibility:

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet."

There lies the greatest danger where the brook of childhood flows into the river of life. We call

it adolescence. So many streams, alas, are already polluted before they reach that point. It is well to remember that the smaller the stream the easier its pollution. A child's mind gets much of its coloring before it is twelve. Then the mind is keenest to register new impressions because it is not yet overcrowded. A certain woman says she plants her garden so full of flowers that weeds just do not have room. If a child's mind is full of fine things, evil ones can be crowded out. On the fine, clean page of a young intellect it is easy to impress beauty and to write high ideals. On a clean, new page a single word is more impressive than hundreds of well-turned sentences on a well-filled page.

The child mind is naturally an acquiring and an inquiring mind. It is like malleable metal. From the metal of childhood will be forged the tools and weapons with which the man must meet the world. They must withstand the steady, dulling grind of everyday living.

Would you send a youth to slay a dragon with a blunted sword or expect a bird to soar far into the blue with a bruised pinion?

Where are America's children gaining their ideals? What are they being given as the truth? What is the yardstick of America's ambition and behavior? It is through the radio, the movies

and the comic strips that they receive the most persistent teaching. Bible school meets once a week; secular school meets five days a week; the family meets occasionally—but the movies, the radio and the comic strips “go on forever.” Much that is fine is presented by these mediums, but there is also much that is questionable, both morally and spiritually. Do mothers and fathers always trouble to know what is filtering into the young minds in their homes? Do the movies which your child sees make crime, ruthless adventure, killing and debauchery seem exciting and attractive? Do they stimulate the passions and rouse the emotions? Are the jokes which come over your radio risque? Is the music cheap and the drama tawdry? Do you know what comic strips your children read? Most of them are not comic. Most of them are just trashy pictorial stories. What kind of magazines appear on your neighborhood newsstands? What sort of pictures do these magazines have?

There are fine, worth-while, entertaining movies, the best in music, really clever jokes, wholesome magazines to be had. Do you just send the children to the show to be rid of them, or do you have firsthand knowledge of what they will see and hear? Titles are often deceiving. Children's tastes are unformed and unreliable.

What sort of books are the youngsters with whom you have contact reading? Most public libraries are zealous in screening out objectionable books. Some private and renting libraries are not so conscientious. Why not have a church library?

What sort of preaching are your children hearing? Are they exposed to long tirades against vices about which they ought to know nothing for years to come? Are your children singing paeans of hate which masquerade as patriotic songs? Are they learning lessons of bigotry, narrowness and dogma instead of the limitless truths of Christ? Are the sermons they hear political harangues embellished with Bible texts, or do they hear about God's love?

The responsibility for children's ideals belongs to adults. The adult intellect should have developed discretion and discrimination. Instinctively children rely on the tastes of their elders for mental nourishment, just as they rely on adults for physical care.

From what sort of home environment is your child receiving the influence for his ideals? Streams often are colored by the sort of clay in the surrounding country. Are there parental disharmony, domestic dishonesty, disregard of personal property rights and discourtesy in your home? The

child whose possessions are not respected can hardly be expected to respect the possessions of others. The child who sees his mother rifle his father's pockets can hardly take much stock in the words, "Thou shalt not steal." The child of discord can hardly believe, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Can such a child ever come to know that "a soft answer turneth away wrath"? How can a home where there is discourtesy teach, "Be ye kind to one another"?

We must not let it be possible for the children about us to say, "What you do speaks so loudly that we can not hear what you say." "Don't do as I do, but as I tell you to do," is a pretty unconvincing command.

A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Prov. 29: 15).

Correct thy son, and . . . he shall give delight unto thy soul (Prov. 29: 17).

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22: 6).

No one but a moral pervert would expose a child to a contagious disease; yet because they are thoughtless or lazy, many normal people expose their children to immorality, dishonesty, obscenity, profanity, discord, discourtesy, intemperance and all the other ills of the human mind.

God made the streams. He made them pure and clear. We are charged with keeping them unpolluted.

Prayer

Grant us, heavenly Father, the wisdom, patience and social conscience to watch over and safeguard Thy little children. May no words, action or neglect of ours cause one of them to stumble or prevent one single child from increasing in favor with God and man. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "I Love to Tell the Story," "I Think When I Read," "Around the Throne of God," "The World Children for Jesus," "Wonderful Words of Life," "Tell Me the Story of Jesus," "Saviour, Teach Me, Day by Day."

TALK IV

FRIENDSHIP

How drear and bare would be the earth
Were it not that fair flowers blossom there;
As cheated as the ear that hears no mirth,
The eye that sees no good thing anywhere.

Unlovely as the hand that giveth not to need,
But selfish, for self clutches to the end;
Barren and thwarted as a sterile seed,
Thus is the life, unflowered by a friend.

—*F. O. I.*

There are some spots on the globe where no flowers grow, but men rarely choose those for abiding places. There are some ears that deny mirth and some eyes that are blind to all save the bawdy and obscene, but who would wish himself to be so handicapped? There are, of course, some sterile seeds which do not germinate. They are worthless. Who would wish to live the life of a sterile seed? That life leads to true death, utter oblivion. There are, to be sure, some people too poor to acquire most of the flowery adorn-

ments of living, but none is so poor that he can not give his friendship to another. Poor indeed is the soul who calls no one friend. Most of us are blessed with many.

Napoleon, that self-sufficient conqueror, said, "Poor indeed is the friendless, though he be master of an empire."

All kinds of men in all sorts of times have sought and valued friends. Friendship is the golden shackle that binds the hearts of men together. It enables them to resist misfortunes and it multiplies the savor of their joys. "A faithful friend is a strong defense, and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure" (Ecclesiasticus).

In 1 Samuel 18 and 19 is found the following story of friendship:

The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved David as his own soul. Jonathan and David made a covenant because David also loved Jonathan as his own soul. David went wherever Saul sent him. When David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, the people said, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands"; and Saul was very angry. He told Jonathan and all his servants that they should kill David. Jonathan told David, and David fled. Then Jonathan said, "Go in peace. The Lord be between me and thee forever."

It is a long story and most of the details have been omitted, but the essentials are there. Jonathan's love for David, together with his protection of David from his father, Saul, is a beautiful example of friendship. It is a noble story.

In John 15, Christ speaks this noble word on friendship: "Ye are my friends, . . . Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, . . . Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:14, 16, 13). None of us needs to be told who spoke those words or who that friend is. Jesus is the Friend of every Christian. No man is so mighty that Christ did not die for him. None is so poor and despised that he can not count Jesus his Friend.

There is an old proverb which says, "The true test of friendship is adversity." Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil about you." Yes, all the unfortunates of the world are blessed in Christ's friendship. In sorrow or in joy He is unfailing. Fortunate is the one who has accepted the friendship of Christ.

Friend after friend departs.
Who has not lost a friend?
There is no union here of hearts,
That finds not here an end.

—*James Montgomery.*

Thus did the poet describe earthly friendship,
and he might well have added:

But there is One whose friendship doth forever last.
All tribulation it survives, surmounts, endures.
It welds the future and the present with the past,
And with an endless chain our souls doth make secure.

—*F. O. I.*

Emerson said that the only way to have a friend was to be one. If we accept Jesus as our loving, helpful, faithful Friend, we ourselves assume the obligations of friendship. Remember Jesus said, “. . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . , ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

Only by being a true friend to others can we become a link in that endless chain of friendship which reaches into eternity. Who, then, would not echo the words of Samuel Walter Foss:

Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Prayer

Lord, lead us into a closer fellowship. Teach us friendliness, kindness and mutual trust. Bless our loyalties and temper our impetuositities with forbearance. Season our forbearance with love. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," "I've Found a Friend," "Blest Be the Tie," "There's Not a Friend."

TALK V

THE PATHWAY TO PERFECTION

Read Deut. 32: 1-4; Ps. 18: 30; 19: 7-11; Rom. 12: 2:

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.

Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. . . . his work is perfect. . . .

As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: . . . For who is God save the Lord? . . .

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Perfection is a superlative word. Webster defines it as supreme and complete excellence.

Some one has said that the urge toward perfection is the divine spark, that likeness of Himself which God planted in man at the creation. The upward struggle of man has been a long one. There have been many digressions and retrogressions, but it has persisted. It still persists. Man has many and changing ideas of perfection; often they are conflicting ideas, but inescapably he yearns for perfection.

"Among the excellencies of man is this one, that he can form the image of perfection much beyond that which he has experienced" (*Hume*).

Only One has yet achieved absolute perfection, and Christ was God as well as man. That, however, should not be a discouraging fact.

Lord Chesterfield tells us that the effort toward perfection is the essential. He says that they who aim at perfection will come much nearer it than those whose laziness and despondency make them give it up as unattainable. What true, wise and inspiring words!

In Deut. 18: 13 are these words: "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God." Only with God's help can man approach perfection and only God can make man attain the ultimate. Christianity encourages men in their strivings towards perfection because it presents to believers the wholly practical, achievable stint of simply striving

—striving consistently and persistently towards the ideal. Christianity alone promises that divine aid which is essential to achievement.

Jesus made the requirements of perfection so simple. To the rich young man who wanted to know how to improve himself, Jesus said, "If thou wilt be perfect, . . . follow me" (Matt. 19:21). By living in the simple, kindly and helpful way of Christ, man makes his nearest approach to perfection. Christ did God's work. We have just read that God's work is perfect. Jesus kept God's commandments. We have read that "the law of the Lord is perfect." Jesus testified for God. "The testimony of the Lord is sure." Yet Jesus lived the life of the man of His day, among the simple and beside the great, just as we today live our lives. He lived in a world dominated by force and material ambition, yet He did not strive for kingdoms nor for wealth and power. Jesus did not teach the fishermen of Galilee that they must dominate the fishing industry of their world. He did not tell Matthew, the tax collector, to levy tribute on the whole of the population. He did not tell Martha to make her house the cleanest and her meals the best in Bethany. He did not tell the man healed of demons to shout his cure to the world at large or to cry it from the house-tops. In Mark 5:19, Jesus is quoted as saying,

“ . . . Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” Of the woman who anointed His feet, Jesus did not ask, “Why wast thine ointment not finer?” He said, “She hath done what she could: . . .” (Mark 14:8). She had brought her best. Perfection is not doing extraordinary things, achieving fame or dominating one’s time and world. Perfection is to be found in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Jesus made clear the pathway to perfection. He said, “. . . Love one another, as I have loved you . . .” (John 13:34). He set the example by going about doing good, healing and feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowing, teaching God’s love and denouncing wrongdoing and hypocrisy. Perfection is a slow, timid growth. It needs culture. It takes pruning. One must cultivate one’s highest aspirations and prune off one’s shortcomings to attain perfection. Full-grown, blossoming perfection is hard to attain, but it is worth working toward.

Paul exhorts men to perfection as follows:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned . . . thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scrip-

ture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, . . ." (2 Tim. 3: 14-17).

Prayer

Dear Lord, we would be ever striving toward Thy three perfections—Thy works, Thy way, Thy laws. We would revere Thy works with nature in the universe. We would do Thy work among the people of our times. We would live in Thy way and keep Thy commandments. Strengthen Thou our efforts, we pray. May each of us add to the ages growth toward perfection until at last Thy children are "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Purer in Heart, O God," "Saviour, Teach Me, Day by Day," "Take My Life, and Let It Be," "Love Divine," "O for a Closer Walk with God," "More Like the Master."

TALK VI

CARICATURE OR PORTRAITURE

Read Col. 1: 2, 13-17, 19, 23, 27; 2: 4, 6, 7, 10, 12-15; 3: 1, 4; Matt. 5: 14, 16.

. . . Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, . . .

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Who is the image of the invisible God, . . .

He is before all things . . .

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.

If ye continue in the faith . . . and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, . . .

God would make known what is the riches of the glory . . . which is Christ in you, . . .

This I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

Ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, . . . abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Ye are complete in him, . . .

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him. . . .

You, . . . hath he quickened, . . . having forgiven you all trespasses;

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, . . . nailing it to his cross;

Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, . . .

Then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Ye are the light of the world.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Paul painted a glowing picture of Christ. Paul's Christ was a triumphant Christ, one who had triumphed over powers and princes, ancient ceremonial sin and death. There have been many subsequent writers, preachers and artists who have painted somewhat altered portraits of Christ. The essential features are the same, but the colors have been dimmed, the features distorted and the strength and triumph of Christ often lost beneath the pious cloak He was supposed to have worn.

Most artists have chosen to depict Christ with a worn face etched deep with lines of suffering and with an emaciated figure. In most sculptured figures of Christ and most stained-glass and painted portraits His head hangs down in defeat and meekness.

Is that a picture of One who "is before all things," in whom "all fulness dwells"? So much stress has been laid on the suffering and shame of the cross that we are in danger of losing sight of its glory. So much has been said about the

suffering and sacrifice of Christ that we are in danger of forgetting His victory. Far too much is made of the roles which Pilate and the scribes and Pharisees played in the crucifixion. Their roles have been elevated into principal roles, whereas they are only the supporting cast. These men were, in the final analysis, but tools used of God to perform the mechanics of His drama of salvation. They were but those minor characters with whom the stage was set.

Christ was meek, but He was never dominated. He was gentle, but He was never overwhelmed by His traducers. He was a man fulfilling a painful destiny, but never a man suffering an agonized doom at the hands of His enemies.

Nothing could be grosser caricature of Christ than to paint His portrait as a weakling, a despairing and conquered victim of the powers of the world.

In John 3:16 are these words: "God gave his only begotten Son." It does not say God was forced to give. He *gave*.

In John 10:15 Jesus Himself is quoted as saying, "I lay down my life." He does not say, "I shall have my life wrested from me." He said, "I lay down my life." In the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of the same chapter one reads: "Therefore, doth my Father love me, because I

lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Are those the words of a weak man overpowered by his enemies and helplessly taken as a lamb to the slaughter? Are they not rather the words of One submissive to the commands of His heavenly Father and confident of the results?

In our gratitude for and appreciation of Christ's sacrifice, in our sympathy for the painful and shameful experience of death by crucifixion, we have been inclined to lose sight of the triumph of the cross in its unpleasantness.

Christ was a man voluntarily fulfilling His destiny. "For this came I into the world," He said. "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."

There is much more than noble forgiveness of His enemies implied by Christ's words, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Those words show that Jesus shared with God the knowledge of His plans.

Recently I saw a portrayal of Christ which impressed me strongly. I do not know who the artist was who conceived and executed it, but he had caught a truer concept of Christ than most.

This magnificent bit of carving depicted a Christ who had laid down His life willingly—not a Christ who had been put to death. This Christ was no scrawny, agonized, sorrowing Christ with drooping head hung low in humiliated surrender. This figure showed Christ as the muscular, stalwart outdoors man that He was. The face was strong, but sympathetic and gentle. It was raised with a serene, triumphant, steadfast gaze to heaven. Christ was depicted not as one who felt Himself nailed to a cross of shame and disgrace, but one who had forever nailed to a cross of atonement and forgiveness the forces of sin. Pilate did not as much condemn Christ to the cross as he condemned himself forever to the contempt and contumely of public opinion. The scribes and Pharisees did not as much crucify Christ as they crucified the veneration and respect which men had accorded them. Judas did not as much betray Christ as he betrayed his own better self.

How could Christ be a physical weakling when He spent His days walking about the countryside? Ask any physiologist. He will tell you that walking is a perfect body-builder. Sympathetic and serious Christ's face may have been. What doctor, nurse, minister or social worker, accustomed to seeing much of human suffering and woe, does not have a face marked by his experiences?

Yet those lips which speak words of comfort and encouragement are ever the ones best fashioned to smile.

The man who goes about his destiny has naught of anything but dignity and self-respect in the carriage of his head. Christ was captain of His fate, a voluntary Hero. "The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, . . ." Jesus told His disciples (Matt. 17: 22, 23). Again He said, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more" (John 14: 19), and, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall . . . leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. . . . I have overcome the world" (John 16: 32, 33). Certainly these were not the words of a helpless, defeated man.

Have you, in your thinking and teaching, been painting a caricature of Christ? Although it may have ever so great beauty and appeal, it is nevertheless a travesty if it fails to show Him as a man strong and triumphant.

Is your life as a Christian pledged to emulate Him, a cartoon of His gracious, effectual life? "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8: 9, 14). Are you a child of God?

Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Ye are the salt of the earth: . . . Ye are the light of the world. . . . Glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5: 13, 14, 16). He was speaking to Christians.

Prayer

Almighty God, reveal Jesus to us truly and clearly. May we see in Him the ultimate of power, graciousness, bravery and love. Help our faulty efforts to pattern our lives after Him. May we never forget our magnificent heritage as children of God, coheirs with Christ. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Let Others See Jesus in You," "The Child of the King," "More Like the Master," "O Worship the King," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "Ye Servants of God Your Master Proclaim," "O for a Thousand Tongues!" "Crown Him with Many Crowns." As a special number, "I Know Whom I Have Believed" may be used effectively.

TALK VII

THE NARROWNESS OF CHRISTIANITY

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.

—*Old Hymn.*

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, . . . (Matt. 7: 14, 15).

Wide and narrow—both are limiting adjectives. Everything but infinity must have both wideness and narrowness. Every philosophy, every religion has its widenesses and its narrownesses. Christianity, the widest, least limiting of all religious philosophies, has yet its narrownesses. There are definitely some things for which there is no room in Christianity. One of these is pessimism. No Christian, by virtue of his acceptance of the teachings of Christ, can be a defeatist, a thwarted individual or a pessimist.

Recently, a minister who prides himself on being an ardent student of history and one well

informed on world affairs, made the dreadful statement that no thoughtful, well-informed person could be aught but a pessimist about the world today. Granted the picture is dark and distressing. Granted that peace and human nobility seem nearly to have vanished from the world. Granted that truth is being warped and bent to serve the purposes of men. Still, even in the face of this world conflict and destruction, no one can be a pessimist and at the same time be a Christian.

To be a Christian one must have accepted the teachings of Christ and His promises. Can any one trust in Christ's promises and be a pessimist?

Consider for a moment those verses of the fifth chapter of Matthew known as the Beatitudes. Is it not because of the poorness of their spirit that many are depressed? Yet Jesus promised the poor in spirit the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom eternal and indestructible. There is no need to be pessimistic because many mourn. Jesus says that these shall be comforted. He asked of Mary, as she stood near the empty sepulcher, "Why weepest thou?" Is eternal life so much less to be desired than physical life? Did not Jesus say, "And because I live, ye also shall live. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also"? Does the pessimist's heart bleed for the meek? Did not Jesus say they should

inherit the earth? Why should one be pessimistic over such an inheritance?

Some one said that the meek can not inherit the earth, because they have already vanished from it. The very nature of meekness makes the meek inconspicuous at a time when pomp, pride and vainglorious boasting are the vogue, when even Christians indulge in loud mouthings of sentiments of impatience as ill-bred as they are impotent and unbecoming to a Christian. The meek quietly endure. They do not wear themselves out with bluster and vilification. Hence, they will inherit the earth. When the war lords have done with flagellating the world it is the meek who will pick up the pieces and assume the task of healing and reconstruction. They always have done it. They always will. Jesus has said so.

Jesus enumerated many types of people—the merciful, the downtrodden, the slandered and persecuted. For all of them He promised some reward.

Lives are being lost. Wealth is being dissipated in foolish struggle for world trade and dominion. Yet, to the Christian Jesus has said, “. . . Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things” (Matt. 6: 25, 32).

The Christian can not afford to waste time being pessimistic about tomorrow when there is so much to do to improve today. Worrying about the end of the world is not nearly so much fun as working today, nor so effective. Have you not the faith to believe that God will provide? Jesus was talking of faith when He said to Peter, “. . . Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Is that not a promise of ultimate victory to the faithful?

Jesus promised:

. . . Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: . . . (Matt. 16:19).

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).

. . . Love one another; as I have loved you, . . . (John 13:34).

. . . Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you (John 15:16).

. . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).

. . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: . . . (John 14:6).

. . . He that believeth on me hath everlasting life (John 6:47).

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace (John 16:33).

In the face of those words, how can any Christian be a pessimist? Does not a Christian believe that Christ is God? Does he not believe

that God is omnipotent and omnipresent? Can a Christian believe in God and yet doubt the wisdom of His ways, the outcome of His plans, the surety of His promises?

A poet has said, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." We may not understand those devious ways. Often we substitute our own ways for those of God. There is, of course, much of horror, avarice, cruelty and injustice abroad in the world, but there is less than there has been in ages past. Moral standards are higher. Justice is more merciful. Any student of history must admit that virtue and chastity are more common now than in Elizabethan times. We no longer throw people into prison because of debts. Yet two hundred years ago many of our forefathers came to the American colonies out of the debtor's prison. Because some of the world's people seem bent on stamping out decency and religion, must we all throw up our hands and follow suit? There are more Christians in the world today than there were a hundred years ago. There are more churches and more people attend them. More money is spent for charity than ever before. Is this cause for pessimism?

So much for the past and the present. Can not Christians, taking these things into considera-

tion, trust God for the future? Does being a Christian not presuppose that one should trust God?

Christianity is too narrow for pessimism. Heads up, Christians! Work; do not weep and worry. Helping, not hating, will win peace. Prayer, not pessimism, will prevail against the world's evils.

"If our love were but more simple
We should take Him at His word,
And our lives would be more cheery
Trusting in the power of our Lord."

Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is fixed on thee: because he trusteth in thee (Isa. 26: 4, 3).

Prayer

Thou, O God, hast been our strength and our security in ages past. Fix in us the conviction that Thou wilt work out Thy gracious purposes in Thine own good time. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Work, for the Night Is Coming," "Sunshine in the Soul," "Brighten the Corner Where You Are," "On Your Way Rejoicing," "O Zion, Haste," "How Firm a Foundation," "Faith of Our Fathers," "Standing on the Promises." As a solo, "The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth" is most appropriate. It is beyond the singing ability of most untrained groups.

TALK VIII

"IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?"

Perhaps you have heard the story about the man who was always boasting of how widely read a person he was. "I've read about all the worthwhile things that were ever written," he said.

Another man standing there heard and asked, "Then you must be well acquainted with the Bible. What do you think of it?"

"Can't say I've ever read it at all. It's such a long book to be all on one subject. I suspect it would be tiresome. It's very out of date, too."

"Here, take mine," offered the bystander. "If you have a taste for good literature, you are certain to like it." They met again a week later.

"By the way, here is your book," said the reader. "I have read it. It was better than I thought."

"Read it? In a week? Keep it. I have another."

"I have read it from cover to cover. If I could not read a book no longer than that in a week, I should be a pretty slow reader."

A good many people are like that. They have read the Bible from cover to cover to accomplish the feat. Some people accomplish this task a bit at a time. They set great store by reading a verse or a chapter in the Bible every day. Some Sunday-school classes and societies give special recognition for that accomplishment. One man boasts of reading the Bible through every year.

There is a certain literary-minded gentleman who delights in saying, "The Bible is the greatest piece of literature ever written." It is. But it is more than just that. He fancies himself a reviewer, and it is his practice to take a single book or chapter of the Bible and give a rather masterly literary review of it on Sunday mornings, much as if the books of the Bible were best sellers. The Bible is a best seller, but that is not all it is.

It is more than a bit of classic literature. It is a guidebook, a book of rules, a songbook, a book of prayers and inspiration, a universal book. It is as great a mistake to read the Bible just as a literary composition as it is to read it only as a daily exercise towards winning a prize. Of course, such reading is better than no reading at all, but the person who reads in such fashion is cheating himself. The Bible is a book to be studied. It is a book to make a part of oneself.

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you" (Col. 3:16). If we assimilate the Bible it becomes as much a part of us as our minds and hearts. Read with care, it can comfort us in trouble, encourage us in despair and inspire us to more abundant living.

In 1 Thess. 4:18 one reads, "Comfort one another with these words." In 1 Tim. 5:17, "... Labour in the word. . . ." In Jas. 1:22, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, . . ." The Bible is a record of the experiences of God-minded men; not all good men, but mindful of God. In many cases it is a record of direct quotations from God and from Christ. Can such words fail to be inspiring? "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding" (Job 32:8).

The Bible can help us meet many trying experiences because it tells how other people have met similar tests and have either triumphed over them or been conquered. It tells how Jesus lived, and it quotes Him as saying, "Follow me." Hence it is a guidebook. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

If we are not to read the Bible as we do other books, what should we do with it? Certainly we are not to put it on a shelf for show. Certainly there is no virtue in simply possessing a Bible.

Every Christian should do these three things with his Bible: (1) He should read it thoughtfully with an open mind and heart. In 2 Tim. 1: 13, 14 appears this instruction: "Hold fast the form of sound words, . . . that good thing which was committed unto thee keep. . . ." (2) He should remember what he reads in the Bible. Just memorizing Bible verses to use in answering roll calls is pretty silly. The truths of the Bible are important—not the phraseology. Timothy says memorizing verses is a thing to do, but he adds that the good committed is the thing to keep. (3) In 2 Tim. 2: 15, 24-26, we find more instructions on Bible reading: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, . . . rightly dividing the word of truth. . . . Apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; . . . that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil." The book reviewer may be fulfilling the first part of that command. He does study. He does not fail in teaching, but it would seem that teaching from that angle fails both in meekness and helping the opposed to recover themselves from the devil.

One thing we must not do with our Bible-gained knowledge and wisdom. We must not hoard our Bible truths. In 2 Tim. 4: 2 we are told, "Preach the word." In Mark 16: 15, "Go ye into

all the world, and preach the gospel." That is called the Great Commission. It is the authority for foreign missions. Does it not also mean that wherever we go, anywhere in all the world, we are to teach the gospel truths of salvation. Preach and teach have the same meaning in the Bible. Knowledge is more easily "caught" than "taught"! By living the gospel way at home and abroad we preach to all the world. Few hear our words, but many see our actions. People whom we never see, never in all our lives get a chance to speak a word to, are affected by our code of living.

What is the Bible to you? To some it is just literature. To historians it is a sourcebook. To some it is a biography. To some it is poetry, drama, narrative, philosophy. What is it to you? To some it is nothing. They read it just as they would read any other book, but it is not like any other book. Is it nothing to you?

Prayer

Incline our minds to a fuller understanding of Thy great truths, O Lord. Reveal Thy purposes to our meditation upon Thy Word. May we be good stewards of Thy revelations. May knowledge of Thy perfect precepts confirm us in kindly, righteous and godly living. By our lives

may we teach Thy way unto the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Thy Word Is Like a Garden, Lord," "Wonderful Words of Life," "I Love to Tell the Story," "Lamp of Our Feet Whereby We Trace," "O Word of God Incarnate," "Holy Bible, Book Divine."

TALK IX

FEMININE ALCHEMY

Some gentle souls the power possess,
Imbued with grace and charm,
All places and all work to dress.
Bleak earth they light and warm.
Each life they touch they do impress,
And work an alchemy most rare.
Of every hearth they make a home,
Of every home a heaven fair. —F. O. I.

Every one knows women like that—women who seem to make lights glow brighter and flowers bloom more abundantly wherever they go; women who have a genius for binding up wounds and comforting aching hearts. "It's a gift," we say carelessly, and are prone to give no deeper thought to the matter; yet genius is only the capacity for hard work; charm is applied tact, and tact is kindness in action.

Why is it that some women seem to live so serenely? Why do their faces shine with calm sweetness? Why do the children of such women make fine men and women? Why do such women

have faithful, adoring husbands? Why do the families of such women hold them in such high esteem? Why do other women envy such women?

There is a sound and practical reason.

Although such women may not be really beautiful, they are possessed of grace and charm. Whence springs this grace and charm? Those who would dwell in an atmosphere of domestic felicity must accept the creating of it as a full-time job. Being a wife and mother is as much a career as being an actress, a typist or a teacher. Sometimes it partakes of all other careers. Certainly the making of a home that is heaven is not a job that can be eked out of tags of time, spare moments, or accomplished with grudging application. There must first be the will and, more than that, the desire to concentrate on homemaking. The vocation of homemaker can not be undertaken grudgingly. The homemaker can not regard the time spent at homely tasks as hours filched from her life. They must be her life.

During the first World War women were forced out of sheltered lives which they had heretofore lived. They assumed men's work and received men's pay. They assumed masculine freedoms and unfortunately many masculine vices. This was not the only unfortunate result. Women began to get the idea that homemaking, wifehood

and motherhood were just a little degrading. They began to feel that the career of homemaking was trivial, a part-time job.

There are many women who are forced to be both career women and homemakers. They are brave women and worthy of much respect, but they are grossly overworked. The woman who is the failure is the one who works her home and family in around the edges of some other occupation which she has adopted from sheer choice.

Webster considers a career and a vocation as nearly the same. Both mean a course of action, an occupation or calling. Is there any sane reason for considering six or eight hours at a typewriter, at an easel, before a camera or behind a counter as more dignified and uplifting than wifehood, motherhood and homemaking? What is there about a song, a painting, a book that is nobler than a home?

Homemaking need not be drudgery. It can be a high art. Certainly it demands all the energy, charm and efficiency that any career demands. In addition, it demands love. That is where so many fall short. They love no one but themselves. Being a homemaker does not necessarily demand physical labor. One "heavenly" home is directed from the bed of an invalid. It is love and unselfish forethought that make heaven of a home.

Almost any woman can be a good housekeeper if she puts her mind to it, but only the wise, patient, understanding and loving woman can turn her house into a home. No charm, no beauty, no cultural attainment is too fine to grace a home.

The courtesans of the world have made the front pages of history, but the homemakers have made history itself. Almost any woman, even the homely, can get a husband, but only the clever and wise can keep him or enjoy a husband's un-failing love and respect. It is harder to charm a husband than a sweetheart, and vastly more important. Even the most stupid women can give birth to children, but it is something else to have and to hold their love, and quite something else to earn their respect and liking. Did it ever occur to you that many children revere and love their parents, but do not *like* them and seek their society? Happy indeed is the woman who knows she is popular with her family.

Husband and wife are equal parts of a single whole. So many men and women are likely to forget that halves are always equal, else they are not halves, but thirds or fourths. Yet halves are separate entities. They may differ, yet they must fit together. Every individual has different ideals, standards and ambitions. Neither husband nor wife should insist that the other conform to his

or her own tastes and ideals. The time to watch for such differences is before marriage. Marriage is not an institution for reform.

God gave men and women different obligations to posterity, but He gave them both responsibilities. They are both parents and both have obligations of parenthood.

There are many rocks upon which the ship of domestic relations can be wrecked. Selfishness is the biggest. Laziness, self-indulgence and temper are others. Self-pity and the unpleasant tendency to consider oneself a martyr are equally destructive. These murder self-respect and slay affection. They rob life of zest and pleasure for self and others.

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, . . . (Prov. 18: 22).

. . . A prudent wife is from the Lord (Prov. 19: 14).

Every wise woman buildeth her house: (Prov. 14: 1).

. . . A virtuous woman . . . her price is far above rubies (Prov. 31: 10).

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her . . . (Prov. 31: 11).

She looketh well to the ways of her household . . . (Prov. 31: 27).

Her children . . . call her blessed (Prov. 31: 28).

Is your home one of those which Norman Douglas had in mind when he wrote in "South Winds": "Many a man who thinks to have estab-

lished a home discovers that he has merely opened a tavern for his friends"?

All homemakers are not wives and mothers. Many women make homes for children not their own. Sisters, aunts and even paid housekeepers can make homes. However, Dudley A. Tyng said, "Households may be well ordered and abounding in comfort; there may be families whose various members live in harmony; but homes in the truest sense there can not be where there is not one whom manly choice hath made a wife, and infant lips have learned to honor with the name of mother." The family circle is the most perfect interpretation and expression of Christianity, as well as its most supreme propagandist. It is in the family circle that Christian character is formed. Would not the role of homemaker and mother be more respected if women realized that homemaking women are God's aides de camp? If the world ever is to be reformed to a more heavenly pattern, it will be through the efforts of mothers, for a mother's knee is the child's first schoolroom, the adult's most sacred shrine. No career pays such rich remuneration. No fame or fortune is so gratifying as being one of those gentle souls who make of hearths homes, and of homes heavens. There is a rich peace that is better than any money, prize, praise or excitement.

No other vocation was so highly honored by God as motherhood. He did not bring Christ into the world as a full-grown man, self-reliant and self-sufficient, but as a little child dependent on a mother's care. Christ's thoughts in His last hour turned to her with love and concern. His last lesson from the cross was one of filial consideration. It was as though, as He drew nearer to God, His appreciation of mother love grew deeper. The height of mother love is one of the last pinnacles which the soul climbs on its way to heaven.

Women work daily at the alchemy of home-making. As the alchemist is patient and persevering, as he is devoted to his art, as he experiments, learning from both success and failure and keeps working on, so women work on and learn and pray—those women who would perform the alchemy of making of every hearth a home, and of any home a heaven.

Prayer

We thank Thee, heavenly Father, for happy homes where peace, comfort and love abide. They are but the earthly reflections cast by that eternal home which Thou hast prepared for Christians. Grant us, as women, dear Lord, a deeper insight

into and appreciation of the privileges and opportunities that are ours. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "O Lord of Heaven, and Earth, and Sea," "Mother and the Book of God," "My Mother's Bible," "My Mother's Prayers Have Followed Me," "Mother Knows," "An Old-fashioned Home," "Blest Be the Tie," "Home, Sweet Home."

TALK X

EASTER ETERNAL

Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing
of birds is come . . . (S. of Sol. 2: 11, 12).

Long before Christ arose from the grave, before He was born, those lovely words were written about spring. There is a certain something to which even the dourest nature responds.

To Christians there is the special appeal of the resurrection anniversary.

Spring with that nameless pathos in the air
Which ever dwells with all things fair,
Spring with her golden suns and silver rain,

—*Henry Timrod.*

is a re-creator, not a constructor. Her return has always been hailed. She brings not new wonders, but returns old ones with new freshness. That is what Jesus did at the resurrection. He did not present Himself to the disciples in a new guise, but as the One they had known and loved. He did not teach some strange new theology, but

added luster to the one He has already imparted. He did not promise some new, fabulous, unknown reward. He promised an eternal continuance of that thing which men love most dearly—life. Christ promised His followers eternal life, and one reason God raised Him from the dead was to convince them He was able to give it. The resurrection came most fittingly with the spring, so that the world, waking again to beautiful, renewed life, might be a constant reminder to Christians of the promise of eternal life.

There had been many springs before the resurrection. People were familiar with the supernatural element in nature's awakening. Christ's resurrection was the greatest miracle of all time. Spring ever after was to be the string tied around the world's finger to remind it of that miracle. Every blade of grass, greening almost visibly after a shower, shouts, "I was not dead, but sleeping." The buttercup, flaunting its sunny beauty on the breeze, sings, "Up from the grave I arose." Every ice-freed stream lisps a rhapsody, "Whereas I was bound, now I am free." Every tree preaches a sermon on eternal life. Even last year's decaying leaves whisper a lesson, "I have fallen but to enrich the life of them that come after me. From my decay still greater glories shall be attained."

Nature does not go protesting and tearful to its yearly grave. It dons a riot of carnival colors. Man alone weeps for a longer span of earthly existence. Man alone sorrows at earthly life's passing.

Christ took great pains to assure Christians of a never ending cycle of life. He assured us of its pleasures and benefits, and gave us the resurrection as an object lesson. Why are we, then, so slow of understanding? We do not weep over birth, yet it promises years of struggle and perhaps hardship and frustration. Death, to Christianity, promises everlasting joy.

I think of the garden after the rain,
And hope to my heart comes singing.
At morn the cherry blossoms will be white again
And Easter bells be ringing.

—Edna Proctor.

Birds and bees, rustling new leaves and running brooks make up the anthem of the Easter bells. Does your heart join in the paeon of thankful praise?

Prayer

O Lord of life, we thank Thee for the beautiful annual reminder of that miracle which all Christians will experience according to Thy sure

promises. May our praise know no respite until we join our voices to the celestial choirs and Thou dost bid us, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord." Amen.

It is suggested, as a fitting close for this devotional, that the "Doxology" be sung happily, yet fervently. Avoid a too quiet, slow, solemn rendition.

TALK XI

BEAUTY WELL BELOVED

As a basis for this devotional, read the following passages from S. of Sol. 4: 1-3, 7 and 7: 4, 5, 7, 6:

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.

Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; . . .

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; . . .

Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, . . .

Thy stature is like to a palm tree, . . .

How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!

The interpretations of the Song of Solomon are many and varied. The simplest and most natural is that which regards the book as a poem or cantata of pure wedded bliss and human affection. It is accepted as such by Irwin in his commentary, and it is as such that it is enshrined in the Old Testament. In "The Bible Handbook,"

Angus and Green gives a summary of it, treating it as a drama. The words quoted are from what in the Hebrew idiom is called the Song of Songs, a marriage ode composed by Solomon probably upon his marriage with one of Pharaoh's daughters. Different though it may be from modern Western phraseology, it leaves no doubt that the beloved was considered surpassingly lovely by the writer.

It is common enough to find odes and poems written to the beauty of a beloved. Literature and music are full of such eulogies. Most lovers consider their beloved beautiful, and most beautiful women are beloved. Probably this explains the age-old desire to be beautiful. Methods of beauty culture are to be found among the earliest peoples.

The Bible records many stories of beautiful women. Let us review briefly a few of them:

A large part of chapters 29-32 and 35 of Genesis are taken up with the telling of the story of Rachel. Probably no lovelier romance has ever been written. Even the modern girl, saturated as she is with the often distorted Hollywood version of romance, must thrill to the romance of fair Rachel. Perhaps the modern woman will not approve of Jacob's meek patience to serve seven years for his bride, and then again seven

more when he found himself deceived by the scheming Laban; but every one must recognize the strength and reality of Jacob's love and acknowledge it as a great tribute to Rachel's charm. "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29: 20).

Rachel's story shows her to have proved worthy of Jacob's admiration. She was as good as she was beautiful. She was not always very wise, but she was loyal, loving, industrious, generous, kindly and devoted to her husband and his interests. She was a praying, God-fearing woman. The caliber of Joseph, her eldest son, shows that she was an excellent mother. Walter Savage Landor is quite right in saying, "Children are what the mothers are." To the end of their father's life Rachel's sons were his favorites among all his children, and to the end of her life and long afterward Jacob cherished and loved their mother. The exquisite Taj Mahal is a magnificent monument to the love and admiration inspired in her husband by Mumtaze Mahal; but the crude monument erected by Jacob over Rachel's grave was a no less sincere tribute to the love of a beautiful woman.

Bathsheba was another woman of whom it is written in the Bible, ". . . and the woman was

very beautiful to look upon" (2 Sam. 11:2). Her story, however, is a far cry from the exquisite, romantic idyll of Rachel, for Bathsheba was a scheming, ambitious woman with a flair for political intrigue; clever and brainy, but unscrupulous and designing and self-centered. It was because of his desire for her that David sinned by planning the murder of her husband. Bathsheba used David's love for her as an instrument to place her son Solomon on the throne, and it was her plotting which later brought about the death of Adonijah, Solomon's rival. Hers was the ruthless hand in a velvet glove, the beauty of which did not hide its cunning cruelty and avarice and clutching power. Her queenly beauty was made hideous by her iniquities and shortcomings.

Delilah was another beauty whose story is a blot upon the annals of beauty. No specific mention is made in the Bible of Delilah's beauty, but Samson's infatuation wrote Q. E. D. to that question. She represents the enchantress without scruple or redeeming virtue. She betrayed her lover for money, using her personal charms to effect his downfall. Her only weapon was her tantalizing beauty; her only technique, an elemental combination of flattery and nagging which is a variety of torture in itself. Treachery, cruelty, avarice and greed are but the more hideous when

they attempt to hide behind the mask of a beautiful face.

There is a host of other beauties mentioned in the Bible, among whom Abigail stands out as the noblest, the great lady. She lived by the principle of *noblesse oblige*, recognizing that position carries with it definite obligations to one's servants, inferiors and dependents. She used her beauty and dignified charm graciously to shield her servants from a fate which the drunken obstinacy and boorishness of her husband had brought upon them. The complete story is found in 1 Sam. 25: 2-42.

Esther was another beautiful woman whose beauty won her a queenship and much power at court, but she was wise and used her power unselfishly to win amnesty and protection for her persecuted people. She showed her gratitude to the cousin who had been her foster parent and adviser, rewarding him richly. The Book of Esther is a history of her career.

In Matt. 14: 1-12 and Mark 6: 17-28 is told the story of Salome and her mother, Herodias, who, because they captivated the heart of a king, we may also assume were beautiful women. They had naught save empty beauty of face and form, and they used their charms basely for the sole purpose of gratifying their personal animosity

toward the defenseless and innocent John the Baptist.

The Queen of Sheba was another beauty who was a queen. She came with charm and splendor to seek wisdom and a trade treaty with Solomon for her country. Her modesty, intelligence and dignified humility won a powerful ally for her nation. Her story is told in 1 Kings 1-13.

All history is full of the stories of the power and privilege accorded great beauty. It tells, too, of the special responsibility and opportunities which great beauties have for service. To a few beauties it is given as it was to Jean d'Arc to serve the nations and permanently affect the subsequent course of human events, but most women have a sphere of influence limited to their homes or perhaps to the towns in which they live.

Modern women have put so great stress on beauty culture that it has developed into a great and lucrative business; but true beauty does not need the ministrations of high-priced specialists, pleasant and improving as their efforts may prove. The French have a proverb which, translated, says, "Beauty without virtue is a flower minus perfume."

John Ray, English writer of the 1600's, wrote: "There are no better cosmetics than a severe tem-

perance and purity, modesty and humility, a gracious temper and calmness of spirit; and there is no true beauty without the signatures of these graces in the countenance." Francis Quarles, another writer of the same period, wrote: "The fountain of beauty is the heart."

Each and every woman, even the most homely, can cultivate this sort of beauty; it is the beauty of the soul. It does illuminate the face, too. Becoming beautiful in that way is not very costly, nor is it very difficult—it is permanent and it is God's way.

Read Eccl. 8: 1; Prov. 12: 4; 31: 30, 31; Jer. 4: 30; 1 Tim. 2: 2, 3; 1 Sam. 16: 7; Isa. 52: 7:

. . . Wisdom maketh his face to shine, . . .

A virtuous woman is a crown . . .

.. Beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her. . . .

When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, . . . in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; . . .

. . . Lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

How beautiful . . . are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; . . . that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

Prayer

Grant us, O God, grace and wisdom and beauty of soul. May we cultivate that glorious beauty which Thou in Thy heart-searching canst see. Help us to grow more gracious and lovely in Thy sight day by day. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "More Like the Master," "More About Jesus," "O for a Closer Walk With God," "Take My Life, and Let It Be."

TALK XII

GLIMPSES OF GLORY

Read:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, . . .

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, . . .

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; . . .

". . . For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house; . . .

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, . . .

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

"By faith he forsook Egypt, . . .

"Through faith he kept the passover, . . .

"By faith they [the Israelites] passed through the Red sea as by dry land: . . .

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, . . .

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

"Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, . . .

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; . . . (Heb. 11: 1, 3-7, 23, 24, 27-34; 12: 1, 2).

"He [Jesus] saith unto them [His disciples], But whom say ye that I am?

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona [which is to say Simon son of John]: . . .

"... Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 15-18).

Faith is a familiar word. We all feel that we know what it means, but let us consider what Webster says about it. To the word faith the dictionary assigns the following meanings: belief, credence, trust in God.

As Christians, we affirmed our faith when we took church membership, but were our convictions unshakable? Has our trust remained steadfast? The Christian world has become prone to stress good works, charity and love more than faith, but faith is more fundamental even than love. Christ spoke not of Peter's love nor of his charity nor virtuous living. It was of Peter's faith that Jesus spoke when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16: 18).

There are many instances in the Bible where faith has been richly rewarded. One of the most touching is told in Matt. 17: 14-20. It is the story of a lunatic boy healed because of his father's faith.

There are many great promises in the Bible, not one of which has ever been broken, but the greatest is the promise of eternal life and of power. These are the things men crave most. Both are promised us as the reward of faith.

Read Matt. 21: 21, 22; 17: 20.

Jesus . . . said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, . . . ye shall say unto this moun-

tain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

. . . Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Unlimited power for such a small amount of faith! Jesus also said, ". . . Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). Faith is the condition of answered prayer. We pray, oh, yes, especially when, as a nation, as a confederation of nations, we are in trouble, we pray without ceasing. The prayer lanes must be even more crowded than the shipping and air lanes. We pray for victory, the safety of loved ones, for peace, for prosperity and for everything else the mind of man can conceive and desire. So many say their prayers are unanswered. Have they examined their faith? Perhaps those whose prayers go unanswered do not fulfill the condition laid down for answered prayer.

One of the most frequent prayers has to do with requests for life. Man in general wants to live on and on. Few, indeed, are those who voluntarily quit this life—so few that we call them abnormal. There are those who fret themselves much about life after the transition we call death.

There is really no excuse for any Christian to do so. This sort of questioning is a bar to his being the child of God. No real Christian can fret over this matter. In John 3:16 we read, "God . . . gave his . . . Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Gospels are the sourcebook of Christianity, and he who does not believe in them is less than a Christian.

It is natural for men to wish to prosper and be powerful. ". . . If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20).

Webster defines faith as trust in God. Are you fearful?

Turn to the Psalms. The psalmist knew all about faith and trust and their comforts.

Read Ps. 37: 1, 3-5, 7; 91: 1, 10; 27: 1, 10, 13:

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: . . .

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

No man has seen God, but men saw Jesus and He said to His disciples, His best beloved, with almost His last words, ". . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, . . ." (John 14:9). We have much trustworthy testimony about Jesus from the men who saw Him.

No man has seen heaven. No one who has gone there has returned to tell us about it. Nevertheless, most of us want to go there. We have taken its desirability on faith because we must. Faith is the window through which we catch glimpses of heaven. The bigger the window the more glorious the view.

GLIMPSES OF GLORY

A glimpse is but a little view;
A transient glance, in passing caught;
A vision brief, but often fraught
With beauties, known before or new,

And blessings, granted when besought.
New vistas, by a little thought,
Are opened up, which hitherto
Remained unknown. A little prayer,
Heart uttered, in a little pause;
A little lesson, gently taught,
Reveals new mercies, blots out care;
And meditation clears the flaws
Of doubt from minds beset. There's naught
Like prayer can throw faith's casements wide,
And only through faith's windows can be spied
Previews of heaven, fair. Though transitory,
Such visions give a splendid glimpse of glory.

—F. O. I.

Prayer

A season of silent prayer is suggested. It may be terminated by the following words spoken by the leader: Strengthen Thou our faith, O Lord. Help Thou mine unbelief. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," "How Firm a Foundation," "Trust and Obey," "Standing on the Promises," "Rock of Ages," "Faith of Our Fathers."

TALK XIII

THE UNDERNOURISHED FAMILY

In 1942 and 1943 the Federal Government rationed food and certain other commodities. They curtailed first our use of sugar and then of coffee. Some of us felt the pinch worse than others. Nobody actually suffered, since there was enough sugar allowed to balance the diet properly. Mothers and housekeepers were particularly anxious on that matter.

Gasoline and coffee fell largely into the luxury class. However, the curtailing of our pleasures did something to us. We need a certain amount of pleasure to be well nourished mentally and nervously. Man does not live by bread alone, Jesus said. All medical men agree with Him in that respect.

In 1943 came the point-rationing system, and again housewives were anxious lest their families suffer from restricted diets.

It would be interesting to know how many of these same good housewives are fearful lest their families become deficient in spiritual food.

To complete the quotation used before, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4: 4). How many housewives fret because their families do not know enough of the Bible? Yet it is in the Bible, and nowhere else, that the words of God are recorded. No mother would think of trying to pluck the orange or other vitamin-rich foods from a thorn bush, but many offer their dearly beloved families mental and spiritual nourishment from every other source than the Bible.

Church attendance and Bible school are other valuable sources of spiritual nourishment. There is no rationing on either of them. Is your family being well nourished?

Mothers desire strong, healthy bodies for their children. They are deeply concerned about their mental attainments. Most mothers earnestly desire that their children shall grow up to be good people. How can they bring this about? Let us read parts of Psalm 119.

Read Ps. 119: 1, 2, 9, 11, 59, 105, 140, 169, 170, 176:

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, . . .

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

. . . Give me understanding according to thy word.

. . . Deliver me according to thy word.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). That bit of Scripture is familiar to all of us. Doctors and scientists tell us that everything which is taken into the body for its nourishment helps determine what sort of body it shall be for evermore. Many and dire are the maladies which are caused by undernourishment in childhood. Probably there are many more which have not yet been traced back to their underlying causes. Many are the lives which do not amount to much because they were spiritually starved.

Reading the Bible and going to church are not enough to nourish the young mind and soul. The Bible must be read with understanding. It must be properly prepared for youthful understanding, just as food must be prepared. So very much depends on that preparation. Churchgoing must be considered a pleasure to have appeal and be habit-forming. It should never be made a

duty alone. Food that is too rich brings indigestion. So lessons taught in too elaborate language or made too long are likely to bring on mental indigestion and defeat the teacher's purpose. One preacher is so obsessed with proving to his congregation that he is an intellectual giant and with stimulating their intellects that he fails to give them inspiration. The spiritual food he offers is badly balanced fare. Certainly religion appeals to our reason and our intellect, but unless a lesson or sermon gives inspiration, spiritual nourishment, it fails utterly.

It is a sad condition that so many are starving in the world today. Although they may not suspect it, some of these are not the underfed. The cry of the prophet Isaiah might be uttered today and be as true as it was in his time.

Read Isa. 1:2-6, 9, 10, 16-20:

. . . The Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, . . . they are gone away backward.

Why should ye be stricken any more? . . .

From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; . . .

Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the Lord, . . . give ear unto the law of our God, . . .

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; . . .

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

That is a scathing indictment. Does it not apply to our present-day world? Certainly there is corruption in high places and low. Certainly there is strife. Certainly there are sin and degeneracy. Certainly the words of the Master are either unknown or disobeyed. Did He not say, ". . . Love one another, as I have loved you"? (John 15: 12). Is the law of love generally practiced? Did Christ not teach, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. . . ." (John 14: 6). Do all men follow in His footsteps? Did Christ not say, ". . . My peace I give unto you: . . ." (John 14: 27). Have we preserved that peace and taught our children to preserve it? Did He not also say, ". . . Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"? (Matt. 5: 39). Have we done this? Jesus did not say how the other cheek would fare,

but He did say, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture"? (John 10: 9).

The psalmist knew and appreciated those pastures which God provides for His sheep:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me . . . ; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: . . .

Those are beautiful, familiar words. Perhaps you know them by heart. Perhaps you learned them in childhood. Have the members of your family learn them. Modern young people are well developed and strong. They are the best-educated generation the world has yet produced, but still many of them are undernourished. Youth today is not as God-conscious, as religious-minded as it should be.

No physical diet is all it should be unless it is well balanced. No education which neglects the spiritual and moral is well balanced. Jesus said, "Feed my lambs," but He made no mention of

grain or fodder. He was referring to spiritual food. Take heed, all ye mothers and housewives.

Prayer

Almighty Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways. We have followed too much after the devices and desires of the world of sin and strife. Forgive Thou us. We have done those things which we should not have done, and left undone those things which Thou by precept and example hast shown us we should have done. Have mercy upon us.

We would, O God, that our families, and particularly our children, should not err likewise. Help us. Give us wisdom to nourish their souls so well with Thy truths that they may live godly, righteous and sober lives to the world's salvation and Thy glory. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "All Things Are Ready," "Break Thou the Bread of Life," "Take Time To Be Holy," "I Love To Tell the Story," "We've a Story To Tell to the Nations," "Some One Is Looking to You."

TALK XIV

SONG OF THE MOTHER HEART

Read Luke 1:46-49:

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid: for,
behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy
is his name.

The above was, according to Luke, the song sung by one mother heart. Mary was young and her heart was joyful at the news which the angel had told her. She gloried in the prospect of motherhood. Is it not sad that her joy is not the universal attitude of expectant motherhood? There are so many women who rebel against the responsibilities and pains of motherhood and never know its joys. There are so many reluctant mothers.

God chose to honor motherhood above every other career. How can any woman feel that there is a finer career than motherhood! It is a career, a full-time career, to be a worthy and successful mother. Young motherhood, first

motherhood, how wonderful it is, how fraught with infinite opportunity! What a hallowed thing God made of motherhood when He ordained that His Son Jesus should be born of woman!

It would have been entirely possible for God to have brought Jesus into the world in some other way. He might have brought Him as a full-grown man just as easily as by virgin birth. No conceivable way could have been more wonderful or miraculous than the way God chose. By His choice God honored womankind. He honored motherhood above wifehood. Most women want to become wives. There seems to be a peculiar sort of stigma attached to being an old maid, although why this should be true is difficult to say.

Naturally, Mary had a very special cause for rejoicing. Her child was to be the Saviour of the world. However, every prospective mother has cause for rejoicing. Every child born has the possibility of great destiny ahead of him. All great men have had mothers, and in any child are the potentialities of greatness. Mary's child was a benefactor of the race; so in lesser degree have other children become. So also will many more children become benefactors.

It is because of the debt the world owes motherhood that there has come to be set aside a special

day called Mother's Day, on which it is customary to honor mothers. The custom is a lovely one, although the day has become sadly commercialized. It is, however, unnecessary to set aside a special Mother's Day, for the right and most fitting way for us to honor motherhood is to live lives which our mothers would feel honored to have us live.

The obligation to honor is mutual. Every mother should live so that she is a credit and an honor to her children.

Motherhood is almost as much a state of mind as it is a physical fact. The following poem expresses this state of mind. It is the song that all worthy mother hearts sing through the years:

SONG OF THE MOTHER HEART

My heart was like a singing bird
That carols in the dawn
Its tender, wistful, waking notes,
On the morning you were born.

My heart was like a singing bird
At noontide, winging free,
The day you won youth's trophies proud,
And brought them home to me.

My heart was like a singing bird
In the drowsy afterglow,
When love a-questing claimed your heart
And you came to let me know.

My heart was like a singing bird
Whose night song can but be
An echo of the day that's past,
With your child upon my knee. —F. O. I.

Had it not been for her illustrious Son, Mary would have lived and died an unknown Hebrew matron. We live again in the lives of our children. Paltry indeed is the woman's soul who does not glory in her motherhood, and unworthy in truth is the woman who is not a worthy mother.

Prayer

O Holy Spirit, God divine, do Thou enrich and purify our lives. Make us humble, brave and loving, ready for the adventure of motherhood. When we rejoice in the Nativity of Jesus, Thy Son, may we appreciate anew the dignity and honor of worthy motherhood. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," "If Your Life Rings True," "Mother Knows," "Some One Is Watching Your Light," "Once in David's Royal City," "There's a Song in the Air," "Is Your Life a Channel of Blessing?" A fitting conclusion of this devotional is the playing of Brahm's "Lullaby."

TALK XV

THE LAMENT OF REGRET

(A Christmas Story)

There was a great deal of excitement in Bethlehem. For weeks the little Judean town had buzzed with talk. It had started with a group of shepherds who told a miraculous tale. This tale was bandied about the inn. It seeped into the palace at Jerusalem, and Herod paced the floor in anxiety. Ever since those wandering Eastern savants had visited him with that story of a new star which announced the advent of a new king, Herod had been troubled and fearful. He enjoyed being king and he did not want to stop being one. Those men from the East had promised to return and tell him where they found that infant king, but they had not come. Now Herod was hearing about some queer doings in the town of Bethlehem down in Judea. Perhaps he had better issue an edict and send soldiers to enforce it. It seemed silly to send soldiers against an unknown baby, but it would be safest. He

would tell them to kill every baby under two years old. That ought to make everything safe.

Herod was not the only man who was having an unpleasant time since those shepherds came in with their strange tale. In Bethlehem itself, the innkeeper was having some very unpleasant things said about him. His business was declining.

"Perhaps I *was* a little hasty," he thought, as he sat alone in his guestless inn. "I could have thrown those drunken merchants out, but how was I to know who those people were?"

Just then there was a knock at the door and the village elders walked in.

"We have come to investigate," they said. "We have heard rumors that you made the Messiah sleep in your stable. They say you refused Him room in this inn."

"I assure you it was all a big mistake," the miserable innkeeper whined. "They looked so shabby. I had no idea who they were. I pledge you my word, if I had had an inkling, I should have turned that rich young merchant and his friends out of the best room. I was so busy I did not even see them. I just cast them a glance. There were so many strangers."

"But the woman. Did you not notice her distress?"

"Oh, I saw that she was quite young and very tired, and that she was heavy with child, but she was so poorly dressed and—"

"Yes. We heard. We also heard that you crossly ordered them to move on."

"It was because of the woman's condition that I consented to let them stay in the stable. Just pure goodness of heart on my part, I assure you." The innkeeper wrung his hands.

"Yes, we heard about that. What did you do to make them more comfortable? Did you clean the stall?" The elder spoke severely.

"No-o. I tell you, I did not know—"

"Did you not see the star and hear the singing of the angels?"

"I was so busy waiting upon my trade. Those rich young roisterers were demanding almost more service than I could give. I was that busy! Somebody did say something about a star, but what do I know of the heavens? Who am I to read the heavens right? I am an innkeeper, not an astrologer. The first I knew there was a band of dirty shepherds demanding admittance at the gate and clamoring to see the newborn King. They were babbling some strange tale of singing angels and peace and good will."

"Did you then go to the stable and join the shepherds in their adoration?"

"Oh, I let them in, although my heart mis-gave me. Shepherds are a wild lot. I was very busy, I tell you. I did not know—"

"So you have said. Tell us when those men from the Orient came, what did you do then?"

"I waited upon them carefully. This inn is famed for its service, Masters, as you well know. I gave those important men and their beasts the very best."

"We understand," said the important elder, and they went out. Over the door they paused to write, "Against the Messiah, he shut the door."

People continued to avoid the inn, and dust and cobwebs gathered in its best rooms. When the innkeeper ventured outside, the children cried after him, "There goes the innkeeper who had no room for the Messiah." So the innkeeper stayed inside.

His wife and his servants departed and he sat alone in his public room, growing old and muttering to himself, "If I had only known!"

One day he heard a gentle knock and, turning, beheld a stranger standing just within the door. It had been so long since the innkeeper had seen that door opened that he shielded his eyes. It must be a very bright day outside. The light around the stranger hurt his rheumy eyes. He could hardly see the man who stood before him.

"You saw me naked and clothed me not. You saw me hungry and ministered not unto me, but verily I say unto you, I am the door; if any man enter in he shall be saved. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Ask and it shall be given you. For every one that asks of me receives, and he that seeks finds, and to all that knock it shall be opened."

The voice was so gentle that the innkeeper forgot his fear of men and made so bold as to ask, "Who are you that bids me knock and promises that it shall be opened unto me? At what door must I knock? For what shall I ask?"

"I am the way, the truth and the life. He that believes on me shall not perish, but have eternal life," answered the shining stranger. "I am he against whom you closed your door. I am he that was born in your manger."

"My Lord!" The innkeeper bowed low. "And yet you bid me enter? You promise me whatsoever I ask?"

"Yes, even you. They that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. The Son of God came not into the world to judge the world, but to save it."

"Ah, Master, if I had only known it was you that night, I would not have turned you away. Come in now and abide with me always."

"Nay, not so. But remember, verily I say unto you that night was not the only time you turned me away. Even as you have done it unto the least, you have done it unto me."

And suddenly it seemed to the innkeeper that he recognized the stranger. He was that man whom he had seen led through the streets of Jerusalem once, bowed beneath a cross. He had seen him later hanging on that cross on a hill outside the city. Then it seemed that there appeared a crown, nay many crowns, about the stranger's head, and above him a host of angels began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth among men." And the innkeeper fell on his face and worshiped.

Jesus has come to a good many doors and asked to be let in since that night when the star shone above Bethlehem and the angels sang. Some hearts have received Him joyfully, but He is still standing outside others, gently demanding admission. Many, like the innkeeper, will one day take up the lament, "If I had only known."

Is some one standing outside my door,
Weary and poor and worn,
Waiting patiently for me to decide?
Is that figure so forlorn
The Master, gently saying once more,
"Open! I would with thee this day abide"?

I must not deny His meek asking,
Though wild and unkept He be.
Nay. See, I open wide.
Beneath that dirt may be masking
The Master. It may be He.
Enter, Stranger. With me you shall abide.

—F. O. I.

Suggested hymns: "Into My Heart," "He Is Knocking,"
"Just Outside the Door," "Fairest Lord Jesus."

TALK XVI

PLUS OR MINUS

Read Acts 3:1-6:

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, . . .

A certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

Who seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple asked an alms.

Peter . . . said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: . . .

A chairman who had charge of preparing the dinner for the workers' council of a certain church asked for volunteer helpers. There were many and varied services to be performed. There were flowers for the table to be secured, the food to be bought, cash donations to be solicited to finance the supper, table waiting, a program to be prepared and a score of other duties to be done. No one volunteered, so the chairman began to seek individuals for specific services.

Mrs. Jones' husband had a well-paying war job, so she was asked to give cash.

"I am so sorry, but the little I could give this week would not be a drop in the bucket. Mr. Jones lost three days last week. Some other time, perhaps," answered Mrs. Jones.

The chairman murmured something tactful about being sorry and hoping Mr. Jones would soon be back on full time, and turned to Mrs. Brown, "Could you prepare some of the food?"

"Oh, dear, no," Mrs. Brown said, blushing with modesty, "I'm not a very good cook."

It was very discouraging, but the chairman persisted. "Mrs. Smith, could you send us a flower centerpiece from your garden?"

"I'm terribly sorry, but everything has gone past its best just now, and—well, it's late in the season. I wouldn't want to offer the poor specimens that are in the garden now."

The chairman did not press the matter. What was the use? But it was exasperating. She dismissed the meeting, but driving home she was reminded of that parable Jesus had once taught about the man who made a feast and invited many guests. When the meal was ready, the man sent his servant to tell the guests that everything was in readiness. "And they with one accord began to make excuse." Those were the very words

from the Bible; the chairman remembered them quite clearly. She knew now how exasperated that host must have felt. She had forgotten how the parable ended, but she did remember where it was to be found in the Bible. It was in Luke 14: 16-20. As soon as she entered her house she got out her Bible and turned to Luke 14. Perhaps this parable would help her solve her problem. Reading hurriedly, she ran her finger from verse to verse down the page. Ah, there it was, in verses 23 and 24. She read them aloud:

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

"Into the highways and hedges," murmured the chairman. She shut her mouth in a firm, straight line and made a dash for her car. "Flowers," she said to herself. "That Mrs. Black who lives on that truck farm at the edge of town has some rose bushes in her front yard."

When the chairman asked Mrs. Black for flowers, Mrs. Black said, "Now let me see. The roses are all frost-bitten and my chrysanthemums have not started to bloom yet, but there are a few eggplants still left, and one white squash, and three yellow ones, and maybe a few tomatoes,

and there's plenty of bright maple leaves. I saw in the homekeeper's magazine where folks are using vegetables for centerpieces instead of flowers nowadays. Now, if you could use—"

"Quick! Give me the things you have and be sure to come in for the workers' council supper tonight and see how they look." The chairman was smiling, picturing in her mind the colorful centerpiece which the vegetables and leaves would make.

"Now, there's the program," she thought as she drove back to town. "Before the meeting, I asked that Mason girl who sings, but she said she had not learned any new songs and that everybody had heard her old ones. Maybe Miss Thomas, the choir director, will sing. We ought to have some kind of music."

"Oh, I am sorry, but I have a sore throat," the choir director answered, when she was asked. "But I have a lot of records of Negro spirituals. They are old and pretty well worn, but people know them and love to hear them over and over. Maybe you can use them. And I have an old accordion that I can play. Perhaps people would like that, too."

The chairman almost hugged Miss Thomas. "Now," she thought as she drove away with the records and record player in the back of the car

beside the vegetables, "if I could only have gotten help with the cooking and serving and the dish-washing. I shall just have to do the best I can myself, but it is a big job for one person." Maybe the bakery shop would have something she could buy already prepared. "Maybe I can get enough pies, and if it is not too late, maybe the baker will cook some sort of roast for me."

"Oh, I am sorry; all our ovens are in use," said the baker, "but I have part of a baked ham in the delicatessen department. We cooked too much today. If you can use that, I'll give it to you; and there has been a cancellation on some rolls and a cake, if—"

"My, yes. That will be fine," the chairman beamed. It was really working out fine. A salad would not take long, and she could open canned peas.

"I rather hate offering left-over stuff to the church, but—" the baker apologized.

"Oh, please do not apologize. These things will fill a real need." Restraining an impulse to embrace the kindly baker, the chairman helped load the food in her car between the program material and the centerpiece vegetables.

She stopped a moment at home to get an apron before going to the church. The phone was ringing. "The dish washing will be the real chore,"

she thought as she dashed to answer the phone.

"This is Mary Dale," said the voice on the other end of the wire. "I am so glad I caught you. I was ashamed to speak out in meeting, but Mr. Dale took in a second-hand dish washer on a trade and he has tested it and it works all right. We should like to give it to the church, if you think it is not—well, you know it is not new and—"

"Why didn't you speak out in meeting?"

"Oh, it is not much—just something we had on hand. Mr. Dale will bring it right over and install it in the church kitchen."

"Something I have." The words rang a bell in the chairman's mind as she hastened over to the church. Where had she heard them before? She searched her memory as she drove along. It was still puzzling her as she worked in the church basement getting out dishes and silver and tablecloths. Suddenly her thoughts were interrupted by what for a moment she thought was a cyclone. It developed, however, into the Scout troop and their leader in search of mass drinks of water.

"Are you having to put on the supper all by yourself?" asked the leader. "Well, that's too bad."

"Oh, I have had some help. It is only the table-setting and the serving and fixing the plates."

"Hey, wait a minute! You can't fix plates and wait table at the same time. Now, Scouts are not trained waiters, but we do have feet and legs and hands. We can at least fetch and carry. How about it, fellows; do we set these tables and wait on them?"

"Yeah, boy!" The response was unanimous.

"You will have to show us how to set the tables, if you can spare the time."

"No, she won't," a small boy spoke up. "My mother says I am the world's worst table-setter. I always get things on the wrong side. But my sister—she's a whiz! I'll go get her."

"Mine, too." Off scampered another boy.

The workers' council supper was a little late that evening, but it was served and eaten and enjoyed. Late that night the chairman, now ready for bed, opened her Bible to the passage suggested for the daily reading. It was Acts 3:1-6, the passage quoted at the beginning of this devotional. It was the story of Peter and John and the lame man at the gate of the temple called Beautiful.

"Such as I have, I give unto thee," the chairman read. Why, that was what the people who had helped her with the council dinner had done. That was what Peter had done. He had no silver or gold to give to relieve people's miseries, but he had given the best that he had. Jesus had

given the best that He had—His life. What, compared to that, were her own services, or a few vegetables, or food, or records, or a dish washer? What did cooking and music and waiting and setting tables amount to compared to any one's life—let alone the life of God's own Son?

The tired chairman climbed into bed and almost at once fell asleep, or perhaps she was only half asleep when she seemed to see another dinner. The guests sat at table and a woman came quietly into the room. She carried an alabaster box. No one seemed to notice her until she broke the box and poured the sweet ointment it contained over the feet of one of the diners. Then there was a burst of censure. Over and above the babble of blame a single voice that was gentle and sweeter than silence said, ". . . She hath wrought a good work upon me" (Matt. 26: 10). Why, that was Jesus speaking, the chairman seemed to hear herself say, and then swiftly the scene changed.

She was one of a crowd outside a temple door, and there was a chest there, and rich men passing by dropped into the chest costly and handsome gifts and money. Then one passed who was shabby and wore rusty widow's weeds, and she cast in a very meager gift. As the woman turned away that same sweet voice said, "Of a truth . . .

this poor widow hath cast in more than they all" (Luke 21: 3).

Then the dream, if dream it was, passed and the chairman slept, but the dream lingered with her after she awoke.

"Why, that is what Peter and John did," she thought, upon waking. "They did not apologize to the lame man because they could not give him the money he expected. The woman did not apologize because her ointment was not more costly, more fine. The widow did not apologize for her mite. All of them gave simply, gladly and modestly just what they happened to have.

"It is the pluses—what you have—not the minuses, that count in Christ's services. Religious service is a positive thing," concluded the chairman. "Such as I have I give unto thee."

Prayer

We dedicate, O Lord, unto Thee those gifts, those talents, such services as we are able to perform. We give unto Thee our lives and ourselves such as they are. For such as we have and are Thou wilt receive, O Lord. Amen.

Suggested hymns: "Just as I Am," "Give of Your Best to the Master," "Help Somebody Today," "Somebody Did a Golden Deed," "I Gave My Life for Thee," "Take My Life and Let It Be."

TALK XVII

THE CROWD AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

The following account of the crucifixion is compiled from the accounts given in the four Gospels. It is in effect a gospel medley. Read:

Pilate said, "What shall I do with him whom ye call the King of the Jews?" And they said, "Crucify him."

Pilate saw that a tumult was arising. He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man." Then Pilate scourged Him and delivered Him to be crucified.

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the courtyard and gathered about Him the whole cohort. They put on Him a royal robe and platted a crown of thorns and put it upon His brow and a reed in His right hand. They mocked Him and spit upon Him and smote Him upon the head, and when they had made sport of Him they took off the robe and put upon Him His own garments and led Him away to be crucified. As

they came out they found a man of Cyrene and they compelled him to go with Jesus to bear His cross. And there followed a great multitude.

There were two others, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. They took Jesus unto that place called Golgotha, in Hebrew, where they crucified Him with a malefactor on either hand.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

The soldiers took His garments and they cast lots for them. And people stood beholding, and the chief priests mocked Him and they that passed by. One of the robbers that was crucified with Him cast upon Him reproach, but the other rebuked that one and said unto Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And Jesus said unto him, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

There were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother and His mother's sister, and Jesus saw His mother and that disciple whom He loved. He saith unto His mother, "Woman, behold thy son," and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother."

And He gave up the ghost. And that centurion who watched over Him, seeing, said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

A man named Joseph, a man of Arimathea who was a counselor, a good and righteous man

(he had not consented to their counsel and deed), begged for the body of Jesus and took it and laid it in a new tomb.

Easter always presents again to memory the series of tragic events that led up to Calvary. Each step in the chain of events presents a vivid picture. Artists have tried to catch all the significance in these pictures, but the word pictures given in the Gospels still remain the most detailed and impressive.

Let us study closely the last tragic picture. Three stark crosses are silhouetted against the Judean sky. Around them mills a motley and heterogeneous crowd, a gathering of all sorts and conditions of men and not a few women. They had been drawn thence by many and divers reasons. Some of them had followed all along the way. At least one man had been compelled to come.

There were soldiers representing that ancient fraternity, the minions of established political power and militarism. These were calloused, avaricious men, the more tender side of their natures war-hardened. They viewed the crucifixion with concern only for dividing the spoils—Christ's garments. They gambled for them, untroubled by conscience. They believed that it was not theirs

to reason why, nor to question right or wrong, but theirs only to obey the commands given them by their masters. Many such as these still crowd around the foot of the cross at Easter in our churches.

In that crowd long ago were the idle and curious, the indifferent and unstable, followers of the popular trend of the moment. Such can always be found in any crowd. They want to see and be seen at whatever seems to be the event of the moment. Having no firm convictions of their own, they are easily swayed into following what seems to be the trend of public opinion. They go along with the crowd, partly to be amused, partly to seem conventional and partly to be in the company of men they deem for the moment more important than themselves. There were chief priests, Pharisees and Sadducees in the crowd that watched Christ's crucifixion—and these were important men. When these mocked Jesus, the irresponsible and idle mocked also. The world is still full of their ilk.

There were fearful men in that crowd, men who realized their shameful guilt; ambitious men for the most part these; men who also knew how fickle mobs are and feared a change in public opinion. These men wondered fearfully if they, in turn, might be betrayed or if they had better

take steps to assure their own safety by betraying others. Such men always wonder thus.

Among that crowd were scornful, disrespectful, pitiless men. One such cruel man offered Jesus vinegar when He thirsted, and another, more sadistic and bloodthirsty, pierced His side with a spear.

There were the religious ritualists and dogmatists who cared nothing for a man's life nor for new revelation of truth, if only their own dogma might remain secure.

Doubtless the simple, probably ignorant country man who had been forced to carry the cross still lingered in that crowd. How mixed must have been his emotions!

Jesus classed all these men together and gave them forgiveness. "Father," He said, "forgive them. They know not what they do." The thoughtless, the ambitious, the cruel, the indifferent and fearful—all were classed together and accorded forgiveness. The simple country man had at least the reward of his service, the inner knowledge that he had done what was required of him, and that inadvertently he had helped a fellow man bear an intolerable burden. For all of these Jesus prayed, and to all of them He left His gracious pardon. He left His understanding pardon to those faithful, but timid and futile, souls who were His followers, but "watched afar off."

The magna charta of the Christian church, of all Christendom itself, is:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Prayer

Gracious heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the gift of Thy Son and for Thy promise of life eternal to all who believe. Grant us, we beseech Thee, pardon for all our sins—those of omission as well as those of commission. We would praise Thee and we would serve Thee without ceasing. Grant, O Lord, that eventually we may enter into the everlasting peace and joy of our Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A fitting and impressive ending for this devotional is to have the first stanza of the hymn, "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," sung as a response to the prayer by the entire assemblage, by an invisible choir or by an individual. The response must overshadow the singer.

Appropriate hymns to be used before the devotional, if desired: "Faith of Our Fathers," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "The Way of the Cross Leads Home," "The Old Rugged Cross," "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," "I Am Thine, O Lord," "Love Divine," "Hail to the Brightness," "O Zion, Haste."

JUL 26 '55

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