

“HOW TO EXPERIENCE A GLOWING LIFE”

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Mt.10:39

The other day I stopped off at Wesley Memorial Hospital to visit some of our parishioners who are there. Following my pastoral calls I wandered into a new wing which has just been completed. There I bumped into my personal physician and he invited me up to see his new office.

This man is not only one of the truly great specialist in internal medicine living today, but he is also a great person and dear friend.

Following a quick tour of his beautiful new offices and other facilities, Dr. Cummings and I sat down for a brief chat. I told him about the new prayer-therapy groups we have just begun. He was as excited about them as I am.

In the course of our conversation he said something like this,

“You know, John, about half of the people who come to see me ought to see you or some other pastor. Their physical problems are secondary. They are merely symptomatic of the real problem which is emotional or spiritual. What they need is a pastor, not a doctor.”

Then he went on to make this interesting statement,

“Again and again I discover it is not enough for me to be a specialist in internal medicine. I have to be a pastor, too. In case after case it is not the physical state which is wrong with the people I see, it is their mental, emotional or spiritual state. The trouble is not in their bodies but in their souls and in their minds. More and more I am coming to the conclusion that pastors like you and doctors like me should get together.”

Well, one very hopeful sign is that today the minister and the physician *are* getting together with very fine results.

One fine physician who has characterized himself as an “amateur pastor” says the most common complaint he hears from people is that they have lost the “zest for life.” Time after time he reports,

“People say to me, ‘Doctor, I’ve lost interest in things. What can I do?’ I always answers, ‘Crawl out of yourself!’”

That is good advice isn’t it? “Crawl out of yourself!”

Two-thousand years ago Jesus said the same thing in a slightly different way. He said, “He that loseth his life shall find it.” Or, as one translator puts it, “he who hoards his life shall lose it. But he who spends his life for my sake shall save it.”

As a prescription for boredom, tedium, fatigue, and indifference, the idea of crawling out of yourself is amazingly effective.

One reason many people lose their “zest for life” is that they lock themselves up in a one-room cell of solitary confinement to their own interests and desires.

They search out the life-renewing zest which comes from hearts and shoulders with other people. People with whom they can have helpful adventures. There is something terribly debilitating about self-preoccupation. It has a way of sapping our energy. Confusing our values. Reducing the glow in life.

It causes our souls to shrivel and our spirits to shrink. As the old proverb so aptly puts it -- “A person all wrapped up in himself makes an awfully small package.”

And what is worse, life makes an awfully dull package for him.

There can be no zest in living as long as we are confined to the prison house of self-interest. We must crawl out of ourselves. We must lose sight of ourselves. We must start spending ourselves for God and others, for the only thing that we really keep is what we give away.

One of the great things to come out of our prayer-groups is a conscience awareness that -- There is a strength of power and energy most of us lack. Most of us were aware of this sub-consciously, but the feeling was defused. Now the issue has been brought sharply into focus and we have discovered --

There is an eternal vision to which many of us are blind.

There is an inner joy which most of us do not possess.

There is an energy and a wisdom which many of us have never known.

Having discovered these pearls of great price, we want them. We want them desperately. But we have already learned that we will not find them until we crawl out of ourselves and the prison-cell of self-centeredness.

We will not feel that strength. We will not see that vision. We will not find that joy. We will not revel in the energy and wisdom as long as we are preoccupied with self. We must crawl out of ourselves. We must lose sight of ourselves. We must quit hoarding ourselves and start spending ourselves for others.

One of our dear members who is semi-shut in, and who has every reason in the world to be preoccupied with self -- her handicaps are great, her needs are immense, her pain is overwhelming at times -- is, nevertheless, constantly seeking ways in which she can spend her life for others.

The other day I called in her home and we had communion. She took down a copy of Mel Johnson's Record, "Tenderly he watches over you, every step, every hour of the day." We played the record and prayed together and wept together. Then she asked me to read about the love of Jesus and how he gave himself for us. She said,

“Pastor, I am so grateful for all that God has done for me. He has supplied my every need.”

I looked about her room. It was warm and pleasant. But, by the standards of most people it was barely adequate. To her it was proof that God has personally supplied all her needs. She said,

“I don’t hold it against the Lord that I am the way I am. (She made a rather halting gesture toward her body.) I know he is doing something for me through suffering that otherwise could never be done. I only have one regret. My capacity to help others is so limited.”

As I climbed into my car I heard myself saying,

“John Allen Lavender, don’t let me ever hear you complain about anything ever again!.”

And, with the help of God, I hope to keep that promise.

Dr. Karl Menninger was asked,

“What would you do if you thought you were going to have a nervous breakdown?”

The famous physician thought for a moment and then said,

“I’d find the poorest, sickest, saddest, sorriest family I could and I spend the day them. I’d share their burdens. I’d get under their load. And, by the time I’d left, and was halfway home, I’d be well again!”

Just before I left our sister, she gave me a copy of a little poem which she said had come to mean a great deal to her. Actually, I would guess it is the philosophy, or rule by which she has lived all these years.

“Lord, help me live from day to day

In such a self-forgetful way

That even when I kneel to pray,

My prayer shall be for others.

Help me in everything I do
Ever to be kind and true
For that which I would do for you
Must needs be done for others.

And when my work on earth is done
And my new work in heaven begun
May I forget the crown I've won
In thinking still of others.

Others, Lord, yes others.
Let this my motto be --
Help me to live for others
And thus to live for thee.”

This business of crawling out of one's self is no small matter. The rewards are great, but the cost of it is great too. This communion service is evident of that.

Living for others, bearing one another's burdens, cost Jesus his life. Bringing sight to the blind, healing the sick, help to the wandering, food to the hungry and salvation to the lost resulted in the cross. And, even as he hung upon that cruel Roman rack, sagging like a bunch of scarlet rags against the April sky, he heard the raucous laughter of the taunting crowd as with jabbing, jarring syllables they cried,

“He saved others. Himself he cannot save.”

And they were right! This bread, this cup, are evidence of that! If Jesus had spared himself he could not spare others. If Jesus had saved himself he could not save others. And neither can we.

There is always a cross in the background of a glowing life. There was for Jesus and there will be for us.

But tell me, who cannot bear a cross if, just over yonder on the other side of Calvary lies the empty tomb? The reality of resurrection and the hope of life eternal.

Who cannot bear a cross if it results in a crown? A crown whose precious jewels are like the shining, glowing, laughing lives of those whom we have touched for Christ.

Oh, my friend, are you bored with life this morning? Has it lost interest it's? Has its glory grown dull? Then crawl out of yourself. Lose sight of yourself. Release yourself from the cell of solitary confinement to your own petty problems and desires.

Give yourself away, and, in the process, you will discover to your great delight that life has once again become tinged with glory. For, as Jesus said,

“He who hoards his life shall lose it. But he who spends his life for my sake (and for others) shall find it.”