

THE FAVORITE TEXT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE - Coach Bud Wilkinson

“The Key To True Success”

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Mt. 6:21

About ten years ago I heard a propaganda story which had come out of Soviet Russia. It made a tremendous impression upon me for two reasons. First, because it illustrates the clever way in which atheistic communism has summoned to itself much of the spirit of self-sacrifice which actually emanates from Christianity. And secondly, because it illustrates the cause of the major problem confronting the church today: Christians who are more of a hindrance than a help because they have never measured up to what they were meant be.

The story is about three young Russian doctors who, coming back from the war, dedicate themselves to the solving of a particularly knotty medical research problem relating to a certain kind of paralysis.

For more than a year the three work side by side, giving not only their daytime hours, but laboring long into the night. They neglect their families and friends. All thought of rest and relaxation is put aside as they struggle to unravel the problem. But, despite their arduous efforts they are unable to achieve a break through.

As their research continues into a second, and then a third year, it becomes obvious that one of the young men has begun to tire. An attractive offer of a scholarship to do advanced study in Switzerland comes to him. Rationalizing that by taking it he would still be serving science, he leaves his two companions to labor on without him.

Later the second young man decides that he should return to private medical practice. His family and friends have been putting pressure on him, insisting he is working too hard and neglecting them, for what? A project that offers little if any chance of success.

So the third young man labors on alone. Working by himself in the great laboratory day after day, and deep into the night, he forms a lonely and forlorn figure. But one day, his discipline and drive pay off. He finds the key to the research problem which has stumped him. An experimental operation is performed on Tasha, a little girl suffering from this form of paralysis. The operation succeeds and little Tasha walks.

Over night the young doctor becomes a hero. He is acclaimed throughout Russia and a reception is given in his honor. Among the guests are the two young scientists who had begun the research with him years before. As the crowd surges forward to hail the heroic efforts of the doctor who has performed what seems to be a miracle, his two former colleagues stand at the edge of the crowd.

There, on the periphery of things, they engage in a sober conversation. And they say to each other,

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

It’s a penetrating question, isn’t it? “Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?” It illustrates the cause of one of the most perplexing problems facing the church of Jesus Christ today,

“Christians who are more of a hindrance than a help because they have not measured up to what they might have been.”

Over against this story I want to set a text. It is a verse which I believe can provide the motivation some of us may need. It’s the favorite scripture of C.B. “Bud” Wilkinson, Director of Athletics and Head Football Coach at The University of Oklahoma.

In his chosen field “Bud” Wilkinson stands at the summit. During his years at Oklahoma he has amassed the most amazing record of achievement of any major football coach in history.

His teams have won over 90% of their games. They have gained 12 straight conference championships. He has sent teams to 7 bowl games and won 6 of them. He holds the all-time collegiate record of 47 straight victories and 123 consecutive games in which his teams have scored.

The list of honors which have come to him and his teams is almost endless . From “National Champions” to “Coach of The Year.” Anyway you figure it, Bud Wilkinson and his Oklahoma Sooners have racked up a record of achievements that is extraordinary!

What’s the secret of such success? How does a man get to be number one in his chosen field? What is the plus factor which, when added to such obvious ingredients as ability and opportunity makes for superior performance?

For “Bud” Wilkinson it is a text. Matthew 6:21 --

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

This is a verse which, according to Coach Wilkinson is,

“The governing factor in the choice of action and conduct on the part of almost everyone of us.”

I want to take that propaganda story out of Russian and, alongside it, I want to place a text. this scripture from the pen of St. Matthew.

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Here, etched in subtle and sublime simplicity, are both the cause and cure of so many of our ills.

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.”

In tackling this text my mind turned to three dreadful dragons which lash out at the human spirit,

cutting our accomplishments to shreds. Keeping us from being what we might have been. I call them: Distorted Drive, Deficient Discipline and Deferred Doing. Let's take them one by one.

Distorted Drive

The first of these dreadful dragons which strike at the human spirit and keep us from being what we might have been is Distorted Drive. Nothing can cripple a Christian more quickly, or cause him to hobble through life, than failure to choose wisely those goals toward which he commits himself.

One of the saddest sights in all this world is the spectacle of a child of God spending his energy and ability in unworthy channels. After unworthy goals. The inevitable end of Distorted Drive is to drift off to the edge of the mainstream of life, and wind up a spectator, a person who might have been.

Harry Wolfram, our night custodian, has become a delightful source of good humor. Once or twice a week Harry stops by my office with something he has clipped out of a magazine or newspaper. A while back he laid this one on my desk.

A small boy was eating an ice cream cone in a crowded elevator. As the lad maneuvered around for “eating room” his cone squashed into the back of a lady's beautiful fur coat. To which his mother exclaimed,

“Look out, son, you're getting fur on your ice cream.”

It seems to me that a good many Christians have a sense of value about that jaded. They have apparently forgotten that “this world is not (their) home, (they're) just a passin' through.”

They're worrying about getting fur on their ice cream. They struggle and strain to get social prestige and economic security in a world that was never meant to last. A world which, with each passing moment, looks more and more like Vesuvius on the verge of erupting

I’m not taking thoughtless “pot shots” at the so-called “good things of life.” If I read the New Testament correctly, the “good things of life” have their place. The Lord Jesus was no kill-joy. But he *did* make it clear that if we want to lay up treasure where it really counts, we must put first things first. He went on to say that if we do that, the *things* we’re so worried about will take care of themselves.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these *things* will be added unto you,” he said.

Unfortunately, most of us reverse the process. We spend our energies and abilities in a mad scramble for “*things*,” hoping the Kingdom of God will be added unto us. In saying that, I’m not just concerned about our passion for more material “stuff,” but our insatiable thirst for those other “*things*,” those intangibles like status, prestige and power.

We have sought after these in the hope that the Kingdom of God would take care of itself, but it won’t! Many of us have found our day-dreams turning into nightmares, as we discover the dreadful dragon of Distorted Drive can devour a man, chewing his cherished fantasies to bits.

Dale Evans put it this way,

“All my life I sought for the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, but
I found it at the foot of the cross.”

If there is anything our text tells us, it’s that we must be awfully sure of our goals. We had better forget about teaching our children how to hold their cocktail glasses correctly, and begin teaching them how to pray. We had better give less attention to the “social graces” of how to “eat, drink and be merry” and pay more attention to the spiritual graces of faith, hope and love. We had better spend less time instructing our kids in how to make the “right” contacts, and more time in how to touch them how to reach out and touch the healing hem of the Savior’s garment.

Indeed, dear hearts, we had better be mighty sure those goals to which we give ourselves, and toward which we point our offspring, are worthy of children of the King, lest falling prey to the

dreadful dragon of Distorted Drive we spend our lives for that which is dross, and come to the end of things far short of the souls we might have been.

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The second of these stifling serpents is --

Deficient Discipline

Sometimes, after we have made the right choice of life goals, we fail to be what we might have been through lack of preparation and self-discipline. There is a happy bit of doggerel which says it rather cleverly:

“It takes a little courage and a little self-control,
And some grim determination if you want to reach the goal.

It takes a deal of striving and firm and stern-set chin,
No matter what the battle, if you’re really out to win.

So here’s a rule to guide you as you seek prosperity:
Never put your wishbone where your backbone ought to be.”

That’s not very good poetry, but it makes very good sense! Mr. Webster defines discipline as “training which corrects, molds, strengthens and perfects.” I can’t imagine a quality more needful for victorious living than that. “Training which corrects, molds, strengthens and perfects.” Nor is there a quality less common among Christians.

Most of us are like the teenager who thinks he’s ready to drive, just because he knows where the starter button is. He doesn’t want to fool with the bothersome business of learning the rules of the road. Or the limitations of his car. And the casualties along our streets are the sad result of such Deficient Discipline.

Many of us adults suffer from the same disability. We want all of the benefits and thrills and freedoms of Christian living, without going through the tedious process of preparing ourselves. We want to march into the front line trenches of life and overcome our fears and difficulties, without going through squad drills and battle training.

Our high casualty rate, the quickness with which we “pull in our horns,” the manner in which we slink away, licking our wounds after a brief encounter with discouragement, and the reticence with which we take on the adversary, are evidence of the fact that we have fallen prey to the dreadful dragon of Deficient Discipline. We haven’t properly prepared ourselves to attain the high goals which God has set before us.

When the mother of James and John came with her sons asking that they be given a prime place in the Savior’s Kingdom, Jesus answered,

“Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

He wanted them to take stock of first requirements, and forget about final rewards. To be concerned about how life was going in, rather than how it was coming out.

All of us would be better off if we took his advice, if we buckled down to the indispensable business of building into our lives those disciplines which are needful if we would get where we want to go in the realm of the spirit.

“You’ve Got To Have The Horses”

Casey Stengel, a rather flamboyant figure from the world of sports, made an interesting comment after he won his 10th American League Pennant. He was quoted as saying,

“I couldn’t have done it without the team.”

That’s the understatement of the year. I’m sure Coach Wilkinson would say, “You’ve got to have the horses” if you’re going to win a championship. You can’t win ball games with inferior material, inadequately

trained.

Be it baseball, football, or faith, the same principle applies. To win in this struggle with life, requires our human best filled with the Holy Spirit. It requires us to take full advantage of those blessed and abundant resources God has made available to us in Christ. Prayer guidance. Bible wisdom. Divine companionship.

It means we match these inherited resources with a response of our own in the form of: Consecrated service. Faithful stewardship. Unswerving loyalty. Unconditional obedience. We can't afford to neglect any one of them. If prayer or worship or obedience or service are just a gesture, we are licked before we begin. We struggle against an enemy whose forces are razor-sharp and battle-keen, and it takes our human best, filled with the Holy Spirit, to win.

So let's be done with the shabby business of looking to Christ for what we can get, instead of what we can give. Let's be done with the folly of supposing we can enjoy more and more of God's goodness, while doing less and less in return. The dreadful dragon of Deficient Discipline must be slain. We must learn to pray with Amy Carmichael,

“From prayer that asks that I may be
Sheltered from winds that beat the hill,
From fearing when I should aspire,
From faltering when I should climb higher,
From silken self, O Captain, free
Thy soldier who would follow thee.
Let me not sink to be a clod.
Make me Thy fuel, O flame of God!”

Deferred Doing

The last of these double “D’s” which would destroy us, and my list is by no means exhaustive, is Deferred Doing, or the habit of putting things off.

Sometimes our dallying is the result of that first dreadful dragon, Distorted Drive. We have so many irons in the fire, and we change them so often, nothing ever gets hot but the handle! We are so busy climbing fences to get at the so-called greener grass on the other side, we never gather the harvest which lies at our feet.

Sometimes our procrastination is due to the second dreadful dragon, Deficient Discipline. Because we lack diligence and never really work at this business of being a Christian, we fail to forge our resources into worthy tools to be used against the adversary.

As a result we are hesitant to tackle the task. We know we're not properly prepared. But, whatever the cause, this spirit of dalliance is crippling the Kingdom's cause. It is making us more of a hindrance than a help, by keeping us from being what we are meant to be.

The other day one of my fellow pastors told me of a parishioner who suffered a heart attack from which he is not expected to recover. As the minister visited with him in the hospital, this man spoke out of deep emotion and with painful difficulty as he said,

“Pastor, six months ago they asked me to teach a Sunday School class of young boys. I had no other office in the church, and I realized that for years I was merely using the church as a cloak of respectability and as a badge of prestige. But I turned down the opportunity with the excuse that my business demanded so much of me I didn't have time for a Sunday school assignment. I was wrong, but it is too late now. If only I had known six months ago what I know now. I am sure that the Sunday School class would have had at least six months of my life and the benefit of my Christian service.”

Procrastination is not just a thief of time, it is also a thief of accomplishments, and of the joy of a job well done.

“Shark Story”

This spirit of dalliance is also destructive because it undermines the attitude of urgency we must have if we would get the task done. The August issue of Guideposts tells the moving story of Shirley O'Neill and Albert Kogler, both 17-year-old freshmen at San Francisco State College, my Alma Mater.

Shirley was a Catholic, and as he put it, Al was “not much of anything.” They had gone to the beach by the Golden Gate for a swim. As they were paddling around about 50 yards from shore, Al was suddenly attacked by a shark. He screamed for Shirley to get away, and while the first impulse was to swim frantically for shore, she went back to him. At any moment she expected to feel the teeth of the shark, but for some reason it didn't strike again. She was able to pull Al to shore, one leg gone, bleeding profusely, gasping for air.

The Coast Guard Ambulance was called and Shirley began to give him artificial respiration, but it was no use, he was dying. Then Shirley said,

“Al, let me baptize you! Al, is it all right?”

His eyes, which had already grown dim in death, seemed to focus a moment, and he whispered,

“Yes, please.”

Shirley leaped up and ran to the water. She held her bathing cap in the surf and let the foaming sea water fill it. Then she ran back to Al and knelt beside him.

“I baptize thee,” she said slowly, as the water ran over his forehead,

“in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

As the Coast Guard rescue crew lifted him on to a stretcher Shirley tried to lead him in prayer.

When he didn't have strength to repeat the words with her, she begged,

“If you can't talk, just follow the words. Say them in your heart.

‘I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and pains of hell.’”

The best he could do was to whisper, “I love God, help me.” And he was gone.

As I laid the magazine down I asked myself,

“How many members of our church possess such an unashamed passion for souls they would attempt to lead a chum to Christ in a public place. How many of our teenagers, or adults for that matter, would have struggled so valiantly to save a soul from hell?”

Then I asked myself,

“Is it possible that while we Protestants know what we are against, we’re not sure of what we are for, and, as a result, a sense of urgency has gone out of our thinking, our speaking, our doing and a spirit of dalliance has come in?”

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

That’s the question the young Russian scientists asked each other. Perhaps it’s a question we ought to ask ourselves, too. Perhaps, as we gather around the Lord’s table this morning, we ought to take another look at our goals to make sure they are worthy of God’s children. Perhaps we ought to decide to put some diligence into our discipleship so we’ll be ready for whatever life brings. Perhaps we should decide to be done with our dallying and get on with the job, instead of forever making excuses for ourselves and our family.

“Somewhere along the line we became spectators. Where was it?”

That’s the problem.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. . . (for) where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

That’s the answer.