

HOW TO EXPERIENCE A VICTORIOUS LIFE

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Isaiah 30:15

For the answer to the question posed by my title, How To Experience A Victorious Life, I turn to the lovely words of Isaiah 30:15:

AIn quietness and confidence shall be your strength.@

It is one of the immutable laws of life, that our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse. Let me show you what I mean. No one would decry the positive aspects of wealth. We know that money has tremendous potential for good. Anyone who has ever experienced the shattering effects of poverty and the burdensome shackles of debt will gladly testify to the wholesome, spirit-lifting, exhilaration which comes when one is given even the most fragile kind of economic security.

Yet, with all the positive aspects of wealth, we cannot dismiss from our minds the vivid recollections of tragedies which have befallen those who were poor stewards of the wealth God had entrusted to them. Nothing seems to produce such insolence of spirit, haughtiness of heart, arrogance of mind or immunity to the tenderest touch of heaven as money. The love of it, indeed, is the root of all evil. And yet, while we would never decry its positive aspects we would nevertheless admit that, in the case of money, the principle as stated is true: that which is our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse.

Or, take the matter of the current popularity of religion. I suppose the greatest boon to modern Christianity is the tremendous boom of popularity which has surrounded it in recent years. Never before has the church experienced such widespread acceptance. Never before has it faced doors so open unto conquest. Never before has it stood so high in the minds of so many. Never before has it known so little of persecution, sacrifice or rejection.

I would go so far as to say the major problem facing the church today is that it has no problem. And certainly, we don't want to see that changed. It is wonderful to hear people talk freely and enthusiastically about their faith. It is a happy and hopeful sign that, for the most part, churches are full to overflowing. Membership is at an all-time high. Religion is no longer something to be spoken of in whispered tones. We thank God for all of this. And yet, Jesus himself warned, *Beware when all men speak well of you.*

There are grave dangers in this enthusiastic popularity.

There is the danger we will fall into *a fat slumber* and allow lethargy to lay its cold hand upon us.

There is the danger of confusing churchianity with Christianity.

There is the danger we will soft-pedal the radical and challenging aspects of the gospel.

There is the danger we will lose our cutting edge and our ability to slice through to the very core of humanity's problem -- *sin*.

There is the danger that, instead of capturing the moment and using it for conquest in the name of Christ, we will become captured by the moment.

By leaning too hard on our present popularity, it is possible the church will grow limp and shallow, sinking into a dark and deadly decadence. And so, while I thank God for the place of prominence the church enjoys in our current societal setting, I must raise the concern that *that* which is our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse. Our greatest strength may prove to be our greatest weakness.

I don't have time to elucidate further, but I'm sure each of you can think of other illustrations of this immutable law of life. Having stated the principle, let's move on and apply it to the problem before us. When I was led to speak on the theme *How To Enjoy A Victorious Life*, the obvious inference is that some of you are *not* enjoying a victorious life. You are hurried and harried, wearied and worried by the humdrum aspects of life. You may be a Christian, in fact, in all

likelihood you are. But this complicates the matter. For a Christian is supposed to be more than conqueror. And yet, you find yourself dealing with the recurring feeling that life is passing you by without your ever having tasted the delightful joy and sublime contentment you are persuaded it should give. The inevitable question is, *Why?* I think the answer lies, at least in part, in the principle I've just stated: that which is our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse.

Quietness

One of America's greatest blessings is her free enterprise system. Her highly industrialized way of life. No nation in all of history has achieved a standard of living like ours. Nowhere in all the earth have people enjoyed so many of the good things of life as do we. Nearly everyone here this morning lives by a standard which far exceeds that of kings a few hundred years ago. We may not possess as much as they did in terms of houses and lands and isolated luxuries. But, in terms of overall convenience, comfort and gracious living, there simply is no comparison. Even Americans of modest means enjoy a standard of living which excels that of kings a few hundred years ago.

All of this is the result of our finely tooled, carefully organized, efficiently operated system of free enterprise. But that which is our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse. For, as our text so clearly states, *In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.*

But our highly organized, carefully synchronized, wonderfully mechanized, and thoroughly industrialized society has become so minutely scheduled we have no time to be quiet. We are too busy bustling from one demanding situation to the next. Instead of a tool to help us, time has become a tyrant to harass us. The clock is constantly making incessant demands upon our emotional, physical and spiritual energies.

To most of us, the worst possible sin we could commit would be to *just be still*. It seems like such a waste of time. There are so many things to be done. So many interests clamoring for our attention. So many duties nervously insist that we undertake them. And so, instead of being

served by our leisure, we are burdened by it. We find it well-nigh impossible to sit back and just be still so that in *quietness* we might renew our strength. And yet, how desperately we need to do just that. How desperately we need to *just be still*, and, in the stillness, absorb a little of the eternal patience of God.

How desperately we need to get off schedule, *even for a moment*, so we can witness the ways of him who made the heavens and the earth. Who scattered the trees and the flowers over the face of the earth to beautify it. Who set the sun and moon and stars on their course in the heavens. Who created the birds in the air and the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea. Who made man in his own image, and then, having brought order out of chaos and beauty out of ashes -- *rested!*

What a picture! The God of creation, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, pausing for a bit of rest. And yet, we poor finite fools cannot find time to even catch our breath. Little wonder there is so much emotional and mental fatigue. We refuse to heed the wisdom of him who said, *AIn quietness and confidence shall be your strength.*@

My friend, you can never know God deeply, richly or fully if you insist on approaching him in a hurried or blustery way. God is neither hurried or blustery. As someone has said, *AHe never shouts, but oh, how he whispers!*@

Study the infinite patience with which he goes about his work. There is nothing hurried or harried about the operations of God in nature or history or even in redemption. Observe the portrait we have of him in this Book, his written word. Nothing noisy or blustery about his character as it is revealed here. Even in the great act of creation he was not boisterous or bombastic. Instead, we read the Spirit of God *m-o-v-e-d* upon the face of the waters. He *b-r-e-a-t-h-e-d* into them the breath of life. Nothing noisy about that. None of the clank and clash and clamor of our modern creative activity. He *m-o-v-e-d*. He *b-r-e-a-t-h-e-d*.

When he gave mankind the gift of the Holy Spirit, a far greater power than nuclear fission, there was nothing loud or blaring. Instead we're told Jesus *Ab-r-e-a-t-h-e-d* upon them and said, *Receive the holy spirit.*@

And, in what is probably the most descriptive and satisfying picture of God ever given to us in the Old Testament, we find that same mannerism expressed in 1 Kings 19:11-12 --

ABehold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and break in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but God was not in the fire; and after the fire *a still, small voice.*@

Do you see it my friend? The very character of God is quietness. Calmness. Stillness. And, if you would know him deeply, richly, and fully, you must approach him in the same way. A*Be still*, A he said, A*and know that I am God.*@

Take pen and paper and note how again and again the voice of God speaks to his people and instructs them to find strength A*in quietness.*@

2 Chron. 20:17 -- A*Stand ye still* and see the salvation of the Lord.@

Job 37: 14 -- A*Be still* and consider the works of God.@

Psm. 46:10 -- A*Be still* and know that I am God.@

Prov. 1:33 -- A*Whoever harkeneth unto me shall dwell wisely, and shall be quiet.*@

Isa. 7:4 -- A*Take heed and be quiet*, fear not, neither be thou fainthearted.@

Lam. 3:25-26 -- A*The Lord is good unto them that wait for him...quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.*@

And from the New Testament:

1 Pet. 3:4 -- A*(Put on) the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God is a great price*@

1 Thess. 4:11-12 -- A*Study to be quiet.*@

Here is the expressed instruction of our God, repeated over and over, making it so clear even he who runs may read: *Alf you want know me, really know me, be still.*@

How foolish then, for us to bustle into his presence, rattle off a few hasty phrases as if we were reading a shopping list to a grocery clerk, and then expect to derive any satisfaction from our venture with God. If you would enjoy a glowing life you must *Abe still.*@ For the promise is this: *Aln quietness* and confidence shall be your strength.@"

Does that mean you are to do nothing? No. The *stillness* about which God is speaking is the very opposite of laziness or inaction. Its purpose is to help you know him. Its function is to fix your thought on him. Its aim is to feed your soul as he leads you through green pastures and beside still waters. It is, by all odds, the most calm, yet cataclysmic experience you can ever have.

To achieve it will not be easy, but it *is* simple. It will demand discipline and determination to go against everything our mechanized, synchronized, secularized society demands. Instead of forever being busy, we must learn to be still, quiet, calm before the Lord. But that's the last thing we want to do. Especially when we are worried or anxious. But that's exactly what we *must* do if we are to enjoy a victorious life. The promise is: *Aln quietness* and confidence shall be your strength.@"

Bishop Robert Cushman put it this way --

Al will not hurry through the day.
Lord, I will listen by the way
To humming bees and singing birds,
To murmuring trees and friendly words,
And, for the moment in between,
Seek glimpses of thy great unseen.

I will not hurry through the day.
I will take time to think and pray.
I will look up into the sky
Where fleecy clouds and swallows fly,
And somewhere, in the day maybe,
I will catch glimpses, Lord, of thee.®

AIn *quietness* and confidence shall be your strength.®

Confidence

But listen again to this word from the Lord.

AIn *quietness and confidence* shall be your strength.®

Our text is not the only place where A*quietness and confidence*® are working together as keys to a victorious life.

Isaiah 32:17-18 says,

AThe works of righteousness shall be peace and the effects of righteousness
shall be *quietness and confidence* (or assurance) forever.®

Over in 1 John 2:28 we are told,

AAbide in him (and that is what we have been talking about this morning)
that ye may have *confidence* and not be ashamed at his coming.®

What is the basis of this confidence? Well, as I said a moment ago, one of our greatest blessings is our American way of life. Our free enterprise system. There is no denying our nation is strong because our fathers and forefathers made good use of that precious commodity we call
AAmerican know-how®.

But remember the original premise:

That which is our greatest blessing may be our greatest curse.

There are many who have inflated this wonderful way of life out of all proportion. They have placed their *confidence* in it. They lean heavily upon our military might, our economic strength, our scientific acumen and say in substance, AThis is our confidence: whatever problem we have we can solve ourselves.@

But that just isn't so. And the Christian faith must be constantly pointing out the fact that our confidence can never be in a political system, or military alliance, or economic order. We can never equate the kingdom of God with what we fondly call Athe American way of life.@ As Christians our confidence is not in any man-made scheme of things, it is in the great assurance that whatever comes upon the earth God will have the final word, and, in his plan, all things will ultimately work together for good.

In the New Testament there are twenty-six verses in which the word *confidence* appears. The interesting thing about all this is that apart from six of these verses which use the word as a kind of commendation -- such as Paul's greeting to churches, AI have confidence in you@ (that is, I believe in you) --.apart from these six very general uses, every single time the words *confidence* or *confident* are used you will find the context refers to heaven, eternal life or the second coming of Jesus Christ.

AWe are *confident*..rather to be absent from the body, and to be present from the Lord@
(2 Cor. 5:8).

AI am *confident* that he which have begun a good work in you will perform it
unto the day of Jesus Christ@ -- the day of his second coming (Phil.1:6).

AKnowing that ye have in heaven a better and more enduring substance, cast not away
your *confidence*@ (Heb.10:34-35).

There are many others. Each one pointing to the glorious fact that as Christians our confidence is not in any man-made scheme of things, but in the eternal plan of God. We have the confidence that no matter how dark the night, how rugged the road, how heavy the burden, there will be a

day when our faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, and Christ shall come sweeping down the stairway of the stars to claim us as his own.

Should death still our lips and dim our eyes before that happy hour, we have this further confidence that ~~A~~to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord[@] (2 Cor. 5:8).

This is our *confidence*! This is our *hope*. Call it pie in the sky by and by if you will. Call it anything you like. The simple fact is that as Christians

AThis world is not our home,

We~~r~~e just a passin~~=~~ through

Our treasures are laid up

Somewhere beyond the blue.[@]

To be sure, Christ has given us a glorious new quality of life here and now. I can honestly say that if there were no heaven, and if there were no eternal life, if there were no resurrection of the dead, I would still be a Christian. I am persuaded it is the happiest, healthiest, most satisfying way to live.

But there *is* a heaven. There *is* eternal life. There *is* resurrection from the dead. And so, by the grace of Christ we have all this *and heaven, too!*

Christ has not only given us a glorious new *quality* of life here and now, but a glorious new *quantity* of life in the world to come. A life where death and sin, sorrow and sadness, sickness and suffering are forever vanquished and we can join the angels in singing,

AGlory, glory, to the Lamb upon the throne.[@]

Oh, my friend, does it seem sometimes as if life has dealt you an ugly blow? That you have been like a ship at sea without a rudder? Then be strengthened by this *confidence* that God may not settle all his accounts by September 29, 1958. But, there will come a day when the record will be complete and you will hear his glad, AWell done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the

joy of the Lord.®

Then, all of the sadness and sorrow, sickness and suffering, darkness and despair which has often veiled your view will be brushed aside for time and for eternity and you will gaze upon the face of Jesus in all his glory.

AIn *quietness and confidence* shall be your strength.®

There are times when I wish I were omniscient and knew all things so I could look into your heart and see the pain or problem that looms so large.

There are times when I wish I were omnipotent and could do all things so I could stretch forth a healing hand and touch that pain or melt that problem into nothingness.

But I am not omniscient. I am not omnipotent. However, I know One who is! And this all-knowing God who numbers the hairs of your head and sees the falling sparrow, this all-powerful God who hurled the suns into space and holds the depths of the sea in his hands, this all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful God who *does* see your pain and problem, *can* stretch forth a hand to heal and says,

AIn *quietness and confidence* shall be your strength.®

Will you take God at his word this morning? Will you go against everything your human nature says makes for success and *just be still* that you may *know* him? Will you place your *confidence*, not in what you can do for God, but rather in what God has already done for you? Will you rest your *confidence* in the fact that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ? If so, you will enjoy a victorious life, for God has said,

AIn *quietness and confidence shall be your strength.*®