

WHERE DO YOU WORK OUT?



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Divine Viewpoint

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Most young people ask “What am I going to be?” This is one of the first questions that presses upon young people stepping out of the irresponsibilities of childhood into youth. Many times unfortunately the question is generally supposed to be answered when they have decided on some trade or profession. But actually it means a great deal more than that.

What am I going to make of myself? What is the pursuit of my life going to be?

Most of the misery and failures of so many lives is simply that people have never ever really looked that question right in the face and tried to answer it. But they drift and drift, and let circumstances and necessity determine them.

And, of course, in a world like this, such people will turn out, to which most people of thinking turn out, failures as far as all of God’s purpose and plan form them are concerned. **The absence of a clear ideal is the misery and the loss of all young people who do not possess it.**

So we have a text where an old man gives us a Biblical idea of what a young man or woman ought to be and may be. “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the Wicked one.” **“Ye are STRONG.”** “And the WORD of God abideth in you.” **“And ye have OVERCOME the Wicked one.”**

Now that is what the aged John said to some amongst his hearers in those corrupt Asiatic cities. It was not merely a fair ideal painted upon vacancy, but it was a portrait of actual young Christians in these little Asiatic churches. **What we need in our country, and in our churches, are young people to take this realized ideal for their own and make sure that their lives conform to it.**

There are three principles here. The first: THE APOSTLE LAYS HIS FINGER UPON IS **STRENGTH, which is something more than physical strength.** Our young people today are so involved with workouts, and

gyms, and the principle of bodily exercise to the exclusion of spiritual exercise.

THEN HE LETS US SEE THE SECRET SOURCE OF STRENGTH. “Ye have the Word of God abiding in you.”

AND THEN HE SHOWS US THE FIELD ON WHICH IT SHOULD BE EXERCISED, AND THE VICTORY WHICH IT SECURES. “And ye have overcome the Wicked one.”

Strength, secret of strength, success of strength.

1. First, note here the strength which young people ought to desire and to aim at. It is not merely the physical strength proper to their age, nor the mere unworn buoyancy and vigor which sorrows and care and responsibilities have now thinned and weakened. These are truly great and precious gifts, to be preserved as long as may be, by purity and by moderation and to be used for high and great purposes. But the strength that is in muscles is not the strength that the apostle is speaking about here. Nor anything that belongs simply to the natural stage of your development, whether it be purely physical or purely mental.

Samson was a far weaker man than the poor little Jew, “whose bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible,” and who all his days carried about with him that “thorn in the flesh.”

IT IS NOT YOUR BODY THAT IS TO BE STRONG, BUT YOURSELF. **The foundation of all true strength lies here, in a good, strong will.** In this world, unless a man has learned to say, “No,” and to say it very decidedly, and to stick to it, he will never come to any good at all.

Two words contain the secret of a noble life, “resist” and “persist.” And the true strength of manhood lies in this mainly, that, in spite of all antagonisms, hindrances, voices, and things that array themselves against you, having greatly resolved, you do greatly do what you have resolved, and having said, “I will,” let neither men nor demons lead you to say, “I will not.”

Depend upon it, that to be weak in this direction is to be weak in all directions. Strong passions make weak men. And a strong will is the foundation, in this wicked and antagonistic world in which we live, of all real strength.

But the strength that we need and we need to strive to cultivate, **must be a strength of will founded upon strong reason.** Determination unenlightened is obstinacy, and obstinacy is weakness. A mule can beat you at that. "Be ye not as a mule which has no understanding."

A determination which does not take into the view all the facts of the case, nor is influenced by these, has no right to call itself strength. Unintelligent obstinacy is folly, like the conduct of some man who sticks to his pick and his task in a quarry after the bugle has warned him of an impending explosion, which will blow him to atoms.

But that is not all. **A strong will, illuminated by a strong beam of light from the understanding, must be guided and governed by a strong hand put forth by "conscience."** "I should like" is the weaklings motto. "I will" may be an obstinate fool's motto. "I ought," therefore, God helping me, and though the devil hinders me, "I will," is a man's. "Conscience is king." To obey it is to be free, to neglect it is to be a slave.

Isn't this a better ideal for life than gathering many outward possessions, however you may succeed therein? A thousand things will have to be taken into account, and may help or may hinder outward prosperity and success. **But nobody can hinder your working at your character and succeeding in making it what it ought to be, and to form character is the end of life.**

"To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering," says Milton. And there is only one strength that will last. "For even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail." **But the strength of a fixed and illuminated and conscience-guided will, which governs the man and is governed by God, shall never faint or grow weak.** This is the strength which we should seek and which we should make the conscience aim of our lives.

Secondly, note how to get it. **"YE ARE STRONG, AND THE WORD OF GOD ABIDETH IN YOU."** These young asiatic Christians, that John had in his eye, have learned the secret and the conditions of this strength, and not only in limb and sinew, or in springy and elastic buoyancy of youthful, mental, and spiritual vigor were they strong, but they were so because **"The Word of God abode in them."**

Now, there are two significations of that great expression, both of them frequent in John's Gospel, and both of them, transferred to this epistle, and of which will provide for us a word of counsel. By the Word of God, all events, the revelation of God's Truth in Holy Scripture and/or the personal revelation of the will and nature of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, which ever of those two meanings, and at bottom they come to be one, and we draw from them an exhortation.

If you want to be strong, let the Word of God, Scripture Truth, occupy and fill and be always present in your mind. There are powers to rule and to direct all conduct, motive powers of the strongest character in these great Truths of God's revelation. They are meant and designed to influence a man in all his doings, and it is for us to bring the greatest and solemnest of them to bear on the smallest things of our daily life.

Suppose, now, that you go to your job, and some little difficulty starts up in your path, or some trivial annoyance ruffles your temper, or some lurking temptation is suddenly sprung upon you. **Suppose your mind was saturated with God's Truth, with the great thoughts of Christ's being, of His love, of His righteousness, of Christ's death for you, of Christ's presence with you, of Christ's guardianship over you, of Christ's present will that you should walk in His ways, of the bright hopes of the future,** do you think it would be possible for you to fall into sin, to yield to temptation, to be annoyed by an irritation or bother, or over-weighted by any duty? **No.**

Whosoever lives with the thoughts that God has given us in His Word familiar to Christ's mind and within each reach of Christ's hand, **has therein an armlet against all possible temptation, a test that**

will unveil the hidden corruption in the sweetest seductions, and a calming power that will keep his mind still and collected in the midst of agitations.

If the Word of God in that lower sense of the principles involved in the Gospel of Jesus Christ dwell in your hearts, the fangs are taken out of the serpent. If you drink, as it were, any deadly thing, it shall not hurt you, and you will be “Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” Bring the greatest Truths you can find to bear on the smallest duties, and the small duties will grow great to match the principle by which they are done. Bring the laws of Jesus Christ down to the little things, for, in the name of common sense, if our Christianity is not meant to regulate trifles, what is it meant to regulate?

Life is made up of trifles. There are a half dozen crises in the course of life, but there are a thousand trivial things in the course of every day. It would be a poor kind of regulating principle that controlled the crises, and left us alone to manage with the trifles the best way we could.

But in order that there shall be this continual operation of the motives and the principles involved in the Gospel upon our daily lives, we must have them very near our hand, ready to be laid hold of. The soldier that would march through an enemy's country, having left his gun in the hands of some camp follower, would be very likely to be shot before he got his gun.

If you go through the Red Sea, at the mouth of it, where the entrance is narrow, and the currents run strong, when the ship approaches the dangerous place, the men take their stations at appointed places, and the ponderous anchors are loosened and ready to be dropped in an instant if the swirl of the current sweeps the ship into dangerous proximity to the reef. It is no time to cut the lashings of the anchors when the keel is grating on the coral rocks.

And it is no time to have to look about for our weapons when the sudden temptation leaps upon us like a strong man armed. **You must have them familiar to you by meditation, by frequent reflection, prayer, study of God's Word, if they are to be of any use to you at all.** And I am afraid that about

the last book in the world that loads of young men and women think of sitting down to read systematically and connectedly is the Bible.

You will read sermons, and other religious books. You will read newspapers, pamphlets, novels, **but the Scriptures, in their entirety, are a strange book to myriads of men who call themselves Christians. And so they are weak in the Word.** If you want to be strong, “Let the Word of God abide in your hearts.” And if you take the other view, which at bottom is not another, of the meaning of this phrase, and apply it rather to the personal Word, Jesus Christ Himself, the Living Word, that will yield to another exhortation, and that is to **let Jesus Christ dwell in your hearts and remain there, and He will make you strong.**

I believe there is no piece of metaphor or an exaggerated way of putting the continuance of the influence of Christ's example and Christ's teaching upon men's minds, when He tells us that, “If any man open the door, He will come in and sup with him.” I want to urge this thought on you, that it is possible, in simple literal fact, for the Divine Saviour, who was in Heaven while He walked on Earth, and walks on Earth today when He has returned to His native Heaven, to enter into my spirit and yours and really to abide with us, the Life of our lives, “The strength of our hearts and our portion for ever.”

The rest of us who render help to one another by strength ministered from without, Jesus Christ will come into your hearts, if you let Him, in His very GRACE and omnipotence of power and will breathe His own great GRACE into your weakness, strengthening you as from within. Others can help you from without, as you put on iron band round some over-weighted, crumbling brick pillar in order to prevent it from collapsing, but Christ will pass into us as you may drive an iron rod up through the center of the column, and make it strong inside, and we shall be strong, if Jesus Christ dwells within us.

Open the door to fellowship with Him. Trust Him with simple reliance upon Him for everything. Faith is the “door.” The door is nothing of itself, but when it is opened, it admits the guest, so let Jesus Christ dwell at

home in your hearts, and you will hear Him say as you are in fellowship with Him, "Child, My GRACE is sufficient for thee." How modest Christ is. "Sufficient." An ocean enough to fill a thimble.

"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE, AND MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS." "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They should mount up with wings of eagles."

And thirdly, notice THE FIELD ON WHICH THE STRENGTH IS TO BE EXERCISED, AND THE VICTORY WHICH IT SECURES. "Ye have overcome the Wicked One." Strong young people, having the Word abiding in them, and they are victorious overcoming the Wicked One.

There is a battle for us all, on which we will not dwell, the conflict with evil around and with evil within, and with the prince of the embattled legions of the darkness, whom the New Testament has more clearly revealed to us. Young people have many advantages in the conflict. They have some special disadvantages as well. Young people have strong passions, and yet have not much experience. And young people do not know how bitter the dregs are of the cup whose foaming bubbles look so attractive, and whose upper inch tastes so sweet. But on the other hand, you have not contracted habits that it is misery to indulge in, and, so it would seem impossible to break, and the world is yet before you.

You cannot begin too soon to choose your side. And here is the side on which alone victory is possible for a man, the side of Jesus Christ, who will teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight. Notice this remarkable phrase, "Ye have overcome the Wicked one."

John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is talking to young Christians before whom the battle may seem to lie, and **yet he speaks of their conquest as an accomplished fact**, as a thing behind them of the past.

What does that mean? It means this, **that if you will take service in Christ's army, and by His GRACE resolve to be His faithful soldier till your life's end, that**

act of faith, which enrolls you as His, is itself the victory which guarantees, if it be continued, the whole conquest in time. Faith enters you into the service of the Lord, and faith in the Word as being in the service gives the victory that overcomes the world.

There used to be an old superstition that, "Who sheds the foremost foeman's life, his party conquers in the strife." **And whosoever has exercised, however imperfectly and feebly, the faith in Jesus Christ the Lord has therein conquered the devil, and all his works.** And Satan is henceforth a beaten Satan, and the battle, in essence, is completed even in the act of its being begun.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," not only because of our confidence in Jesus Christ, is the blowing of the bugle that summons to warfare and shakes off the tyrant's yoke, but it is also the means by which we join ourselves to Christ who has overcome, and makes His victory ours.

He has fought our antagonist in the wilderness once, in Gethsemane twice, on the cross, thrice, and the perfect conquest in which Jesus Christ bound the strong man and spoiled his goods may become, and will become your conquest, if you wed yourselves to that dear Lord by simple faith in Him. What a priceless thing it is that you may begin your independent manhood, womanhood, with a conquest that will draw after it ultimate and supreme victory.

You will still have to fight, but you will have only to fight detachments. **If you trust yourselves to Jesus Christ, you have conquered the main body of the army, and it is only the stragglers that you will have to contend with hereafter.**

He that loves Jesus Christ, and has given himself to Him, has pinned the dragon to the ground by its head. Though it may "swing the scaly horror its folded tail, and then twine its loathly coils around Him, yet He has conquered, and He is conquering, and He will conquer. Only let him hold fast by the hand which brings strength into him by its touch.

Now, will young people take service in this army? **Do you want to be weak or**

strong? Do you want your lives to be victorious whatever may happen to them in the way of outward prosperity or failure? Then give yourself to this Lord. His voice calls you to be His soldiers. He will cover your heads in the day of battle. He will strengthen you “with might by His Spirit.” in the inner man. He will hide His Word in your heart that you offend not against Him. **He will dwell Himself within you to make you strong in your extremest weakness and victorious over your mightiest foes,** and in that sign you will conquer and “be more than conquerors through Him that loved you.”

Ask yourselves, young people, what am I going to be? And answer it the only way you can answer it. “I am going to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. And to overcome as He has overcome, the world and the flesh and the devil.

“Now, bodily exercise profiteth a little, but godliness in all things.” Most Christians are hyphenated Christians. They over emphasize bodily exercise, which profiteth for a little, and neglect the profitableness of godliness in all things.

Where do you work out? President's First Lady? Gold's Gym? Are you following the President's program on physical fitness? Are you using the Nautilus System? Do you use dead weights? Are you a female weight lifter? Do you take vitamins and avoid eating meat? And take steroids to build your body up, following the principle of bodily exercise?

Do you follow Jane Fonda's workout program, **or the Lord's?** What about Rachel Welch? What about Jack La Laine? What about a rowing machine? Stationary bicycles? Jogging? Walking? What about Richard Simons? *Where do you work out* and what do you work out? **Your body or your soul? Why not major in the major, instead of the minor?**

After you have run the gamut of life, pursuing the life of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, you will find, like Solomon, the same situation will exist for you that existed for him. “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” And you will come to the same conclusion that he did when he said, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: FOR THIS IS THE DUTY OF MAN. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? BY TAKING HEED THERETO ACCORDING TO THY WORD. With my whole heart have I sought Thee: O LET ME NOT WANDER FROM THY COMMANDMENTS. THY WORD HAVE I HID IN MY HEART. THAT I MIGHT NOT SIN AGAINST THEE. BLESSED ART THOU. O LORD: TEACH ME THY STATUTES. With my lips have I DECLARED ALL THE JUDGMENTS OF THY MOUTH. I HAVE REJOICED IN THE WAY OF THY TESTIMONIES, AS MUCH AS IN ALL RICHES. AND I WILL MEDITATE IN THY PRECEPTS AND HAVE RESPECT UNTO THY WAYS. I WILL DELIGHT MYSELF IN THY STATUTES: I WILL NOT FORGET THY WORD.”

Where do you work out? What are you working out, your muscles or your mind? “As a man thinketh in His mind, so is he.” “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

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