

LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO BE LITTLE

"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore." I Kings 4:29.

Scriptural biography is very instructive. Therein the lives of men were written by the infallible Spirit of God. The portraits are all true. Nothing was colored by the partiality of friendship, or penned under the spirit of prejudice. These scriptural biographies were written to incite our emulation of the good and our repudiation of the bad. Of those who flourished under the old dispensation, Solomon held a distinguished place. Concerning him we have this testimony: "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore."

Largeness of heart is the great gift in which all other gifts become possible. Littleness of heart makes all big things impossible, and largeness of heart prevents little things. Only petty things get in a little heart. A large heart has marvelous powers of expansion. It always has room for something more.

A large heart cannot entertain a small thought or a mean mood. Littleness cannot breathe in an atmosphere of largeness. A large heart rejoices in excellency anywhere and everywhere.

Benjamin Disraeli, the Earl of Beaconsfield, who lived from 1804 to 1881, attained eminence as a leader in his day. He won the post of Prime Minister of England. He also enjoyed considerable fame as an author. Back of his great and numerous achievements lay a large store of practical wisdom. I now call your attention to one important and true statement which he made: "Life is too short to be little."

Of this significant statement André Maurois, the French novelist, wrote:

"Those words have helped me through many a painful experience. Often we allow ourselves to be upset by small things we should despise and forget....Here we are on this earth, with only a few more decades to live, and we lose many irreplaceable hours brooding over grievances that, in a year's time, will be forgotten by us and by everybody. No, let us devote our lives to worthwhile actions and feelings, to great thoughts, real affections and enduring undertakings. For life is too short to be little."

Who among us would stand up to refute the truth of Disraeli's words? But here is the rub, theoretically accepting this truth, we frequently deny it in our everyday living. What a pathetic sight to see a man's soul as stunted as a pine sapling on a dry, red-clay hillside! Such smallness of spirit can change our joy into sorrow, our success into failure, and our amiability into bitterness. It can destroy our health, turn our nights into tortuous nightmares, and make our nerves as tight as a violin string. It can drive us to distraction. Knowing all this, however, we continue to walk the paths of littleness of mind and heart, and thus forge chains of steel about our necks to make us the miserable slaves of our own wrong reactions.

I. Life is too short to be little in attitudes.

There is an ancient Arabic legend which relates that, when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, the angel, who held in his hand the flaming sword, said: "Henceforth your hearts must be your paradise." But, when our hearts are centers for unhealthy attitudes, they become, not a paradise, but a hell on earth. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

Consider our attitudes toward the hard knocks of life. Every one of us, sooner or later, runs into experiences that try our souls. What do we do then?

Lord Randolph Churchill, in a letter written to his wife in 1891, said:

"More than two-thirds, in all probability, of my life is over, and I will not spend the remainder of my years beating my head against a stone wall. There has been no consideration, no indulgence, no memory or gratitude — nothing but spite, malice and abuse. I am quite tired and dead sick of it all, and will not continue political life any longer."

Rough-and-tumble politics proved too much for him; and, a few years later, at the age of forty-six, he died, a disappointed and broken man.

Many of us, facing the difficult experiences of life, give up the struggle. Coming upon some situation which appears too big ever to be handled successfully, we lose confidence in ourselves, toss to the four winds our faith in God, and become so discouraged that we are unwilling to carry on. What a tragic thing to confront a hard problem without any adequate resources with which to meet it! Wrong attitudes in the face of such an experience surely spell moral and spiritual failure.

There is available to us, if we will take it, a healthy, creative and victorious attitude toward distressing circumstances. A man only thirty-four years of age, the picture of utter dejection, sure that his life had come to a dead end, knocked timidly at the door of a minister. He had held a good job with a railroad company until his home was broken and he had started drinking for the first time in his life. He had tried to regain control of himself, but had failed to do so. To him everything was as black as a rainy night in a deep forest, with no ray of light, and no glimmer of hope, anywhere.

The minister patiently tried to show the poor man that he had taken the wrong view of his situation, that his trouble lay largely in his own heart. He had allowed attitudes of self-pity, bitterness and vengeance to dominate his waking moments. He was assured that these scars could be removed. However, it could not be done by gritting his teeth and saying: "I'm going to lick this thing, if it is the last thing I ever do." Only by frankly confessing his failure, honestly admitting his inability to save himself, and completely turning his situation over to God could he ever hope to be healed and happy again. He agreed to try the prescription. He became amazed to discover the marvelous power of God which, when freely accepted in faith, rescued him from the bottomless pit of despair and set his feet upon a strong and enduring foundation.

Think, also, of the attitudes of resentment and hate. If you want to blast your happiness, abilities and faith into smithereens, then go on nourishing and coddling an old, deep-seated resentment and hate toward some person whom you think has wronged you. It makes no difference whether the offense is real or imaginary, for the effect in either case is the same.

In his earlier years Andrew Jackson was a man of deep resentments and hatreds. He hated the British, the Indians and his enemies. In 1837 he surrendered his life to God through Christ. He thereby won the greatest victory of his life, the victory over resentment and hate. I wish that all would remember the wise words of Confucius in this connection. He said, "To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it." But let us remember that nobody has the resources within himself alone to win the battle against resentment and hate. Only God is strong enough to win that victory for us.

II. Life is too short to be little in purpose.

Life must have a purpose, but just any purpose will not satisfy our needs. It must be a goal which will bring forth the best within us. One man remarked that what he

feared most of all was to stand before the Great Judge and hear the question, "Well, what did you see in My world?" and having to answer, "I never saw it. I was busy telephoning." As far as our fallible human judgment can discern, multitudes find that a few things partly satisfy most of our desires so that we muddle through life without ever seeing the moral and spiritual world for which God created us.

A young man, splendidly talented and highly trained, went to China as a missionary. Observing his abilities, an oil company representative offered him a job with a fabulous salary. The missionary declined his offer. Naturally, the business man wanted to know why. He said, "Isn't the salary big enough?" The salary is big enough," the young man replied, "but the job isn't."

What is the purpose for which you are living? Is it as small as a physical appetite, a bank account, or a social climb? Or, is it big with the call of God in it? When we set out to see what we can make of our lives, how much of self-control, patience, courage and faith we can attain, how much of kindness and helpfulness we can manifest toward others, we are living for a purpose which will endure for time and eternity. To think sanely of human experience surely will give us the wisdom to discern that a godly life is the grandest achievement in this universe.

III. Life is too short to be little in faith.

Every person has faith in something or somebody. We prove our faith in gravity every time we place our feet on the ground. We prove our faith in a bank when we deposit our money in it. We prove our faith in a doctor when we go to him for the diagnosis and treatment of our diseases. It is not a question of faith or no faith; it is a question as to what is the object of our faith.

Far too many are bowing their knees to the god of things. They think that if the scientific ingenuity of our age can provide them enough things all will be well with them. Many others are worshipping at the shrine of pleasure. They try to extract from life every possible physical and mental thrill before their little day closes. Still others offer their adoration and devotion to the god of power, ever confident that sufficient economic, political and military power will provide an adequate defense against all adversaries.

A contemporary philosopher searched through many volumes of biography and letters to find out what others had thought about life. After many years of research, he came to the conclusion that men without a genuine faith in God often make a brave start but that they eventually lose their courage and become filled with despondency. How foolish people can be! Such is the case with all who are confident that they can manage well without God. Sooner or later, they will discover that after all they do not have any firm enduring foundation upon which to stand in joy and sorrow, success and failure. People can never find the answer to their deepest needs until they acknowledge that they were made by God and for Him and surrender themselves cheerfully unto Him.

Life is too short to live for things. Christ is the only One for Whom we should live. If we sincerely and whole-heartedly live for Him, we will not be little.