

HOW TO FACE THE UNFORESEEN

"Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure." II Timothy 2:19.

Feelings of uncertainty concerning what lies ahead in an individual's life, or a family's life, or a nation's life are often the cause of anxiety and fear. We are all confronted by the problem of the unforeseen. It matters not how secure we are materially, or how excellent our health is at any particular time, we have moments when we are troubled by the possibilities of misfortune which may lie ahead of us. The attitude of many toward the uncertain future is sharply focused by the manner in which they face some of the ordinary experiences of life.

The number of neurotic personalities in the United States has been conservatively estimated at eight million. We have known for some time that more than half of all the hospital beds in the nation are occupied by mental cases. Now what explanation have we to offer? How shall we account for this increasing problem? Doubtless the disease is due, in a very large measure, to our manner of life. All too much we have set as a goal material things, while ignoring spiritual values. We have been spending money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which does not satisfy. All too much we have been concerned with the acquisition of things that perish in the using.

Life itself is lived at too fast a pace in the Western world. The strain at times becomes almost intolerable. You can see it in the faces of many. One of the saving features remaining in Western civilization is the fact that we still have places of worship where we may gather for relaxation, meditation, worship, and the peace of God. A representation of a typical American might be that of a man running up an escalator. You can save twenty seconds that way. Of course you will not likely give a thought as to what you will do with those twenty seconds when you have saved them.

As we think of the uncertainties of the future, we note the fact of its being unknown. Then, there is the fascination of it. There is a tremendous fascination about it, and this fascination takes two forms -- the passion for the new and the desire for the better. There is also the fear of it, the dread that oftentimes possesses us as we look into it, and we wonder what evil awaits us and how we can meet and overcome it. The very fact of this uncertainty is of great value, as it creates the inspiration for preparation. The past is past, we cannot recall it. The present is passing, we cannot stay it. But tomorrow! "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wondrous things."

Comparatively few people are entirely free from anxiety. Many who are making an excellent adjustment of self to life and its obligations allow an ever-present fear of the future to creep into their thoughts and their conversation. Frequently they lament, "If only I knew what was ahead of me." The problems which concern us are both personal and social. What is ahead economically for us and for our world? If only we did not have to face sickness and helpless old age. If only we could be sure of security for our families. If we are to live with a continued sense of personal power it is clear that we must discover the technique by which we can face the unforeseen.

The early Christians were forced by their pressing hardships to learn how to handle this problem. Paul was aware of the most inevitable trials and persecutions which were ahead when he sent the two letters addressed to Timothy. He had left the young man in Ephesus to take charge of the Christian community in that thriving metropolis. His instructions to Timothy were both practical and inspiring. He demonstrated that he had a faith which he knew would help to carry Timothy through whatever might be ahead. Text. The assurance of God's presence, and His interest in the individual Christian's life, were important facts on which Paul felt he could depend.

As we face the future much of our uncertainty can be dissipated if we will accept the implications of this fundamental truth. God is a sure fact! His purposes for the world are everlasting! His foundations cannot be shaken by what individual men, or groups of men, or nations may do. The unforeseen loses its terror when we can testify with confidence that "the foundation of God standeth sure."

Our faith that there is a divine foundation which undergirds all of life makes certain principles necessary and obvious.

1. It enables us to see life in perspective.

The economic and political tensions, the moral laxities, and the physical hardships borne by many people will tempt us to think despairingly of the world and its future. But a study of the conditions which have prevailed during other periods will demonstrate that similar hardships were experienced on those occasions.

2. When you face the unforeseen you should expect great things from God.

As we face the uncertain future, one of our greatest needs is for faith in God. Faith is a mighty power to be used or misused in the adventure of living. Faith is something that enters into the whole of a man's life. The man who believes in himself, in what he is doing, and in his power to do it, is always a more capable and efficient man. Faith in God and in His ability to shape us and to use us is the key to a newer and fuller life for everyone of us.

When we face the unforeseen future it is usually with a fear of possible evil rather than with a spirit of anticipation of the pleasurable events and friendships which may also be in the offing. Those who would be spiritually strong must learn to anticipate the unforeseen goodness instead of bewailing the certainty of impending doom.

We need to remember that God often has raised men who have vision and personal power when there has been a crying need for such leadership. Often those men have come from the most unpromising surroundings. Only those with faith in unforeseen goodness could have believed that the disciples would be able to cope with the prevailing antagonism toward the Christian faith. Yet God used them to open new horizons for all the world.

Unexpected greatness has often been found in human lives which seemed to have but slight opportunity for development. A baby was born in Germany to a drunken father and a tubercular mother. Anyone who looked into the rough box which had been made into a cradle for the baby must have shaken his head in dismay. What possible future could such a child have? Yet Beethoven grew up to write some of the world's greatest music. Hardship may become a springboard to greater achievements than we have ever known before. At least, of this we are certain, there are unforeseen blessings which result from a life of faith. Remember this when you are tempted to see nothing ahead but discouragement.

A generation ago, on an estate in Scotland, the son of a gardener dreamed of becoming a medical doctor. The dream seemed destined to remain unrealized. Neither he nor his father could foresee any possibility that the lad would be able to follow the long course of study in medicine. It seemed inevitable that he would become a gardener like his father. Then came a moment of opportunity. Visitors arrived at the castle to spend a week-end in rest and recreation. One of the boys went for a swim in the pool. Suddenly he was stricken with cramps. His cries for help brought the son of the gardener to the side of the pool. Just as the lad was sinking for the final time the gardener's son plunged in and dragged the drowning boy to safety. Deeply moved by this act of bravery, the parents of the boy asked to see the gardener. "We are grateful for the brave act which saved the life of our boy," said the father.

"We want to reward your son. What can we do for him?" The gardener hesitated a moment, then he unfolded the dream which his boy had held that he might become a doctor. "If you cared to help him," he said, "it would mean more to the lad than anything else in the world." The visitor exclaimed, "The very thing! That settles it! We shall see him through his education."

They carried out the promise which they made that day. Through their generosity the gardener's son became a doctor. And such a doctor! He is Dr. Alexander Fleming, one of the world's great physicians, and the discoverer of penicillin. The boy whom he saved from drowning was Winston Churchill.

There is a sequel to the story of Winston Churchill and Dr. Fleming. A day came when Mr. Churchill was stricken in Egypt with a virulent type of pneumonia. As Prime Minister of England he was needed in that hour both by his own country and by the rest of the world. His advisors reported later that they gave up all hope of his recovery. They could see no chance to avert death. A hurried call was sent out for Dr. Alexander Fleming. In record time, he was flown from England to the bedside of Mr. Churchill, carrying with him a container of precious penicillin. The miracle drug was administered to Mr. Churchill. All the allied world shared with joy the announcement that the disease had been conquered and that Mr. Churchill was on the road to complete recovery.

All of us who profess the Christian faith should learn to expect the best of life. Let others bewail the expected evil. The Christian faith makes it possible for us to look ahead with confidence to a life of spiritual victory.

3. Learn to live a day at a time.

The Master said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." There is strength to be had by all of us if we will meet our problems each day as they arise. We need to live a day at a time. We are not going to be asked to do anything we cannot do. If our burdens seem heavy, we still may be confident that our inner resources will prove sufficient for our needs. Faith in God makes us certain that we may be the recipients of that kind of strength. Day by day strength will be given us for our needs if we will accept the basic truth that "The foundation of God standeth sure." Christianity promises us that we can live triumphantly when we use the resources provided for us. No dark forebodings can blight a life which has been undergirded by the power of God.

CONCLUSION,

1. See life in perspective.

2. Have faith in God.

3. Live a day at a time.

Put your whole heart into the nearest duty. If worst comes to worst, disaster will bring strength to bear it. Strength does not come until it is needed. Victor Hugo has a poem that tells of a bird on a branch in a tree swayed in heavy wind and threatening every moment to break. But the bird still sings despite danger because it knows if the branch breaks it has wings and can fly. So have we -- "As your days so shall your strength be."