



**"THE LESSONS
OF ADVERSITY"**

A Sermon by

Roy E. DeBrand

Broadway Baptist Church
Fort Worth, Texas

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Scripture Reference: Romans 5:3-4

The story is told of a young Persian prince about to ascend the throne. Acutely aware of his need for more knowledge and wisdom, the prince summoned his court philosophers and wise men and commanded them to prepare a history of mankind. They began at once. Twenty years later they presented the king with the fruits of their research — six thousand volumes. Too busy by that time with the affairs of state to read that many books, the king ordered his wise men to condense their findings into one book. Another twenty years passed, and, at last, the wise men presented the king with the book he had asked for. But the king was now far too old and sick to read the book. From his death-bed the king looked up at his wise men and cried, "Then shall I die without knowing the history of mankind?" "Sir," replied one of the wise men, "I will sum it up for you in a few words. They were born; they suffered; they died."

How true it is that suffering, trouble, adversity is not merely something that happens to other people. Suffering is one of life's inevitable universalities. No one escapes trouble.

But I hasten to suggest that how one handles the adversities by which he is confronted determines the quality of his life. Adversity itself is neutral: it can make or break a man, depending on how he faces and handles it. An old adage says, "The same fire that melts the butter hardens the egg." Adversity can bring a person to defeat or inspire him to victory.

The prevailing contemporary attitude toward adversity seems to be primarily negative: that life's ideal is the absence of trouble, that it is an intruder to be avoided, but because it is unavoidable, it is to be resented, or at best tolerated. How foreign this is to the biblical concept of adversity! Recall the Bible's similes for trouble. It is a "refiner's fire," separating the gold from the alloy. It is "tribulation," literally, "threshing," separating the grain from the chaff. It is "chastening," that which disciplines, corrects, purifies. No, far from being negative, the Bible teaches us to have a positive attitude toward life's troubles. Not to the end of boasting of our ability to endure, but to the end of living triumphantly by learning from our adversities.

In Romans, chapter five, verses three and four, Paul shared the triumphant lessons he had learned by suffering adversities. And if ever anyone knew the meaning of trouble, Paul did. Five times he received thirty-nine stripes with the whip. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Shipwrecked three times, he was once adrift on the sea for a day and a night. He faced constant dangers in travel, from the elements, from his own people and from others. He knew the hardship of toil and deprivation, of physical illness and spiritual anxiety. Paul was a man who was well acquainted with adversity. Yet, it was Paul who wrote in Romans 5:3-4, as Phillips translates it:

"We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. Taken in the right spirit these very things will give us patient endurance;

this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady hope, a hope that will never disappoint us."

Paul had learned how to triumph in trouble, and he shared the lessons with his fellow Christians.

Here is the lesson for us: We can live triumphantly by learning from our adversities. Taking this as our general principle, let us look at our text and see how Paul developed in detail "the lessons of adversity."

The first lesson of adversity is patient endurance. (v.3)

The book of Romans is the theological masterpiece of the New Testament. In almost all his other writings Paul was dealing with some immediate trouble, momentary decision, pressing situation, current error, or threatening danger. But Romans is a systematic theological exposition, independent of any immediate set of circumstances. In the first four chapters, Paul was writing about justification — the need of it, and the ground of it in God's action in Christ, which was to be received by faith. Beginning with chapter five, justification is regarded as an accomplished fact, and we move into a consideration of its implications and consequences.

Paul began this consideration by rejoicing in the peace, grace and glory which would be his in the future (5:1-2). But his train of thought was interrupted. Having spoken of joy and hope, Paul was reminded of the sufferings of the present moment. Thus, the words of our text, verses three and four, form an abrupt parenthesis to his line of thought. While thinking of the joy of things future, he was reminded that there is joy to be found "now" as well as "then," joy even in the midst of present trials and suffering.

The key, I think, to Paul's triumph over trouble is found in the words, "Taken in the right spirit." To be able to rejoice in the midst of adversity comes from the recognition of the value of adversity to life. This value can only be fully known to those in Christ, for he puts it all into perspective.

Through the gift of His love, which came through His suffering and death, we are at peace with God and have the certain knowledge that He is in control of things. We know that this loving Creator has given us a purposeful world in which ultimately "all things work together for good." Thus, even in the face of momentary troubles there is an underlying faith that God is in control. And this creates in us the "right spirit," the ability to see value even in adversity, and "we can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles." (v.3)

The word Paul used for "trouble" translates literally as "pressure." All kinds of things press in upon the Christian, thought Paul: want and need, sorrow, persecution, doubt, loneliness. And when such pressures as these are withstood the result is fortitude, steadfastness, courage, patience, endurance.

The word Paul used for "endurance," means more than passive acceptance. It means an aggressive spirit in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the spirit which does not passively tolerate but which actively overcomes and conquers the trials and tribulations of life. It means, in the truest sense, the spirit which has the ability to overcome the world.

One who learned the lesson of endurance over adversity was Beethoven. Threatened with deafness, he did not give up his music in despair. No, his comment was, "I will take life by the throat!" That is what Paul meant by "patient endurance."

The people we bought our house from had planted a cactus garden in the back yard. Knowing that our young son would spend much of his summer outside, I decided to get rid of the cactus garden. I chopped down and dug up all the plants. But I apparently did not get all the roots of one Yucca plant. In a few days, green Yucca sprouts began to appear. Each time they were chopped down, in a few days new ones sprouted up. I finally realized why. The Yucca is a desert plant, used to hardship and deprivation. Its ability to survive lies in the very fact that it makes the most of adverse conditions. It seemingly thrives on abuse and by tena-

acious endurance overcomes adversity. Thus, the Yucca remains in our yard.

We must catch some of the spirit which does not lie down and let trouble roll over it like a flood-tide. We must expect trouble. We must meet it head on and overcome it. We must never ask to be spared adversity, but must ask that when it comes we can handle it well. And, as Paul wrote and exemplified, we can live triumphantly by learning from our adversities!

The second lesson of adversity is that endurance produces character. (v.4a)

Paul was confident that once one gains the ability to face trouble head-on and not shirk back from it, once one learns to patiently endure, the next lesson is character.

The word he used for "character" has two important meanings. It was the word used for metal which had been put into the fire so that all base alloys would be purged out of it. Thus, it conveyed the idea of refinement, purification, tempered strength. It was also the term used for a seasoned veteran in contrast with a raw recruit, conveying the qualities of both testedness and approvedness to character.

Trouble teaches endurance and endurance produces character. The characteristics which we most admire in human nature grow best in a soil well mixed with trouble. Without hardship, there would be no hardihood. Without calamity, there would be no courage. Without trouble, there would be no triumphant living! By learning from adversity we can live triumphantly.

No one personified character and integrity nor inspires me to it more than the sixteenth President of the United States. His character and integrity were the result of his ability to handle and overcome adversity. Born in the humblest of circumstances, he fought hard for privileges we now take for granted: education, democracy, equal opportunity. As a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, he ran for the legislature and was defeated. Then he

tried business and failed, spending many years paying the debts of his worthless partner. When he fell in love with a girl who finally loved him in return, she died. He spent one term in Congress in 1846, but was defeated for re-election. He failed to get an appointment to the U. S. Land Office, lost his bid for the U. S. Senate and for a vice-presidential nomination. When he finally became President, the country was torn asunder by Civil War, which he would have given his life to prevent. But – he never hated anyone, never sought revenge, never lost touch with the common people, and never gave up. Much as we deplore the adversities Lincoln suffered, we know that his quality of character never could have come from ease, comfort and pleasantness alone. He did not simply endure his adversities, he built character out of them.

Adversity adds a new dimension to life. Experience is cumulative, one discovery leads to the next. Trouble can be one of life's greatest teachers. When adversity comes, a soul true to itself builds new dimensions, new depths of character, integrity, maturity. These are lessons we can and must learn from adversity.

Finally, the lessons of adversity teach us hope (v4b).

Paul's original ground for rejoicing, as he began chapter five, was hope. But he was thinking of eternal hope, hope in things future and heavenly. When his thoughts turned from eternal glory to present reality, he was reminded of tests he had endured and of the character which enduring those tests had produced in him. Now he knew that the character which has endured the test always emerges in hope, that suffering adversity leads to new heights of confidence.

This was the key to triumphant living – hope. Only now it was not aloft in pure other-worldly subjectivism, now, having endured and gained integrity, hope was grounded in experience. The experience of adversity can serve to fortify the very hope it seems calculated to destroy. No wonder Paul could rejoice in tribulation and triumph in trouble. The hope that began as an intellectual belief was

strengthened by the experience of life's adversities. His hope was exercised by adversity and grew stronger. Such a hope is, indeed, "a hope that will never disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (v.5).

There is no such thing as a hopeless person or situation. There is always room for hope, and not merely wistful dreaming, but hope grounded in reality. Those who have walked through the valley of the shadow of death with a loved one know best the hope of eternal life. Those who endure physical pain know best the hope of new medical discoveries. Those who suffer handicaps know best the hope of overcoming.

I should like to have been at the University of Glasgow the day Helen Keller received an honorary doctorate. Blind and deaf from infancy, if any situation ever looked hopeless, hers did. But she had hope, and patient endurance, and character. And so did her teacher, Anne Sullivan. And on the day she was awarded that honorary degree she was one of the most radiant and useful personalities of her generation. As they sung the national anthem her companion spelled into her hand what was going on. Later, through the lips of her companion she made a brief response. These were her closing words: "Darkness and silence need not bar the progress of the immortal spirit." Then, there was thunderous applause, which only she could not hear.

Hopelessness? Helen Keller did not know the meaning of the word! Neither did the Apostle Paul. And neither would we, if we would learn from our adversities the fortitude, integrity, and hope that they can teach us.

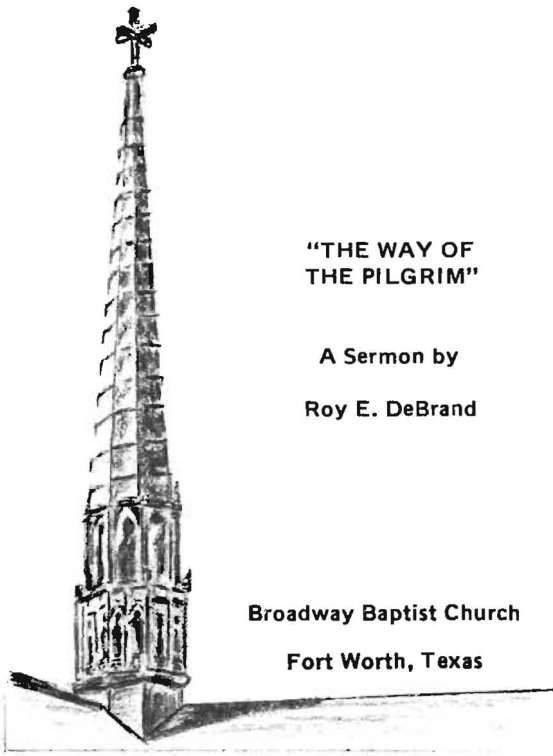
We must learn to live triumphantly even in the midst of adversity. There is no way to avoid adversity, so our task is to handle it well when it comes. Let us learn the lessons of adversity which Paul detailed: patient endurance, mature character, steady hope. For by learning the lessons of adversity we can live better, more triumphantly, more certain that the life we live is supported and sustained by a loving Creator, who has not only given

us life but has appointed a Guide, the Holy Spirit,
to help us through all of life's experiences, even
our troubles.

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**"THE WAY OF
THE PILGRIM"**

A Sermon by
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Vol. XII August 13, 1972 No. 6

Scripture Reference: I Peter 2:11-17

In the fall of 1620, a group of one hundred and two English Separatists set sail from Plymouth, England in search of religious freedom in the New World. Their journey was the culmination of over twenty years of religious oppression and persistent harassment by the English authorities. In the early 1600's they had separated themselves from the official state church of England to worship as they believed right, and for this they suffered continual persecution. They fled their mother country, first to Holland and finally to America on the small ship Mayflower. In December of 1620, they landed on what is now Massachusetts, where they formed the famed Plymouth Colony. The group gained new identity when one of their leaders, William Bradford, referred to them as "pilgrims and strangers on the earth." Since that time the founders of Plymouth Colony have been known as "Pilgrims," a name which in its very definition denotes one on a religiously motivated journey.

Bradford's words were reminiscent of the scripture passage I have chosen as my text, First Peter, chapter two, verses eleven through seventeen. In these verses Peter urged his readers to exercise their Christian responsibilities as pilgrims in this world. The basic idea of both Peter and William Bradford was that the Christian is a citizen of two worlds, the

heavenly and the earthly, and that the earthly world is temporary. Through it the Christian passes on his pilgrimage to his final and real home, heaven. But Peter and William Bradford were also keenly aware that though bound for a heavenly destiny, the Christian must not fail to live responsibly on this earthly pilgrimage. Thus, Peter urged his readers, as Bradford led his colonists, to exercise their Christian responsibilities as pilgrims in this world. Listen as I read this exhortation of Simon Peter to the early church, as it is recorded in 1 Peter 2:11-17.

"Beloved, I urge you as strangers and pilgrims to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that when they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

These words, though written centuries ago, deal with one of the central problems in contemporary Christianity: the tension between other-worldliness and this-worldliness. And this tension seems to intensify as various groups and individuals go to extremes on one aspect or the other. Some are tempted to become other-worldly, ascetic, mystical, escapist on the one hand, while on the other hand many become this-worldly, secularistic, unspiritual, and expediently humanistic. When these positions are emphasized to extreme, and one to the neglect of the other, polarization and disfellowship occur.

What we need to resolve this tension is balance! We must not lose sight of the fact that we're pilgrims in this world, citizens of a higher home, colonists of heaven, "bound for the promised land." Yet, we must not abdicate our duty to live responsibly day by day. We must achieve a balance between living for the future and living in the present. We dare not let the church become so invisible that it loses its visible reality. Yet, we dare not let it become so conformed to the world that it loses its nature as a colony of heaven. We must achieve the balance Jesus prayed for when he asked the Father to keep his disciples in the world, but not of the world.

Therefore, I suggest that in order to achieve this balance we must exercise our Christian responsibil-

ities as pilgrims in this world. The acknowledgment that our life on earth is a pilgrimage to a higher life is foundational. Christians are temporary residents on earth. But this does not diminish the importance of living responsibly. We must exercise our Christian responsibilities to make the most of life here and now. But how? Life is transitory and we are pilgrims in it. How, then do we proceed to live responsibly today? What is our pilgrimage to be about? What does it mean to us as Christians to walk the way of the pilgrim?

First, the way of the pilgrim means exercising moral responsibility in this world (v.11-12).

When Peter penned his first epistle Nero was on the rampage. He had caused Rome to be burned in 64 A.D., and to cover his misdeeds he shifted the blame for the fire to the innocent Christians upon whom he unleashed a fury of persecutions. Along with the blame for the fire, they were accused of every imaginable immorality, including cannibalism, licentiousness, incest, home-splitting, and even paganism. These unjust slanders placed their lives in jeopardy daily. Therefore, Peter wrote this urgent plea to beg them "to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against the soul," and to "maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that when they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation."

To Peter, the Christian's conduct must be able to bear the closest scrutiny. The reason for this, of course, was the malicious slanders that constantly endangered them. Thus he admonished them to abstain from allowing their baser, unchristian, human impulses to become uncontrolled and go unchecked. This warning was against the misuse of the bodily appetites, the constant war that rages between man's carnal and spiritual natures. But it was not only a matter of control and abstention from evil, their whole manner of living was to be positively moral. They were "strangers and pilgrims" in the world. It was by the higher standards and laws of the heavenly Kingdom they were to live, and this meant pleasing God by doing good. Their ears were attuned to a different drummer, their hopes were higher, they had more to live for and therefore ought to live better. In the battle of the soul they were not only to abstain from evil, but assault it from all sides by doing good.

Such moral consistency on both counts was the practical answer to the threat of persecution. To Peter, the way to silence the slander of the unjust charges was to live such a consistent Christian life that the charges became obviously untrue. Their unquestionable goodness could resolve any misunderstanding of their purpose or nature.

Most importantly, Peter believed that the Christian's conduct ought to be such that it pointed

other men to God. Christian morality was not for the sake of goodness alone, nor for the sake of saving one's skin. The highest motivation to Christian living was the missionary impact exerted by moral influence. Those were the days of the infant church. The spread of Christianity was of supreme importance to the Christian minority. And it was Peter's belief that the greatest missionary force on the earth was righteousness on the part of the believer. One who lived in actuality what he believed internally was an undeniable signpost pointing other men to God. Surely Peter was here recounting the words of Jesus, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The truth that Christian morality properly exercised pointed men to God was born out in the lives of the believers. They Christianized the world on that principle. They silenced the slanders against themselves and won men everywhere by the quality of life they exhibited through their moral influence.

Here is our challenge and our inspiration, for the truth still applies. Our lives ought to be such as to bear the closest examination. Let us abhor that which is evil and cling to that which is good, and pray God to know the difference. Let us always remember: that the best argument for Christianity is consistent Christian living; that we are always by what we do either commending or condemning Christianity to others; that the strongest missionary force in the world is a Christian life; that it is by the loveliness of our daily life and conduct that we must point those who still do not believe in God.

Edgar Guest wrote a poem which I think demonstrates the importance of exercising Christian moral influence. It's entitled, "Sermons We See."

I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one
any day;
I'd rather one would walk with me than merely
tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than
the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's
always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men
who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what every-
body needs.
I soon can learn to do it, if you let me see
it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your
tongue too fast may run.
And the sermon you deliver may be very
wise and true;
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing
what you do;
For I might misunderstand you and the high
advice you give;
But there's no misunderstanding how you
act and how you live.

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The way of the pilgrim means exercising responsibility in this world!

Moreover, the way of the pilgrim means exercising civil responsibility in this world (v.13-15).

Considering the persecutions of the period and the fact that the emperor was Nero the Tyrant, it is all but impossible to believe that Peter admonished the Christians to civil responsibility. One would think that the natural thing would have been to say, "Look, you're citizens of heaven, pilgrims in this world below, you aren't responsible to earthly authorities. Drop out. Go hide yourself until the Lord returns to carry you to your heavenly home." But Peter wrote instead that the Christian should be in submission to the government. "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right." Peter believed that, Nero notwithstanding, for reasons higher than his feelings. The key to understanding his admonition is the phrase, "for the Lord's sake." For Peter knew the teachings of the Bible and of Jesus, and knew that human government is divinely appointed by God to maintain order and promote general welfare. Nothing is farther from the teachings of the Bible than anarchy. Christians were instructed to be good, useful, faithful citizens of the country in which they lived. They were always to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." They were to exercise their civil responsibilities in the world, even though they were citizens also of another world. Thus Peter taught that submission to governmental authority was to be God-centered, for it was indeed, "for the Lord's sake."

Peter further stated that human government is God's way of promoting human welfare. The tasks of "governors" or those in regional or local positions of civil authority were to maintain peace by punishing lawbreakers, and to provide civic pride through praise of decent, law-abiding citizens.

Moreover, when the Christians exercised their civil responsibilities and cooperated with governmental authorities they gained an integrity and achieved an understanding with those who otherwise misunderstood their intentions. They put the slanderous accusations of ignorant witnesses to silence. Thus they fulfilled the will of God, and gave an effective witness about him.

Now, there are those who firmly believe that religion and politics don't mix. But those who so believe have missed a major point of the biblical teaching. For, from the beginning of the Bible, God is very concerned with and interested in the political affairs of his people. This was so in the period of the patriarchs. Abraham was promised "kings and nations." Joseph ascended to political prominence in Egypt, as did Moses after him. Politics played a

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major role in the Exodus, and in the establishment of the nation Israel. In the period of the Judges, God maintained the political theophany. When the Hebrew monarchy was established, God appointed and ordained the kings: Saul; David, the greatest of the Hebrew monarchs; and Solomon. Politics played a major role in the period of the divided kingdom, and in the crises with Baal, Assyria, and Babylon. The prophets preached justice and righteousness in the political order. And when the fullness of revelation came in the person of Jesus Christ, the nation was split into diverse political factions: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots. Moreover, there was the problem of Rome and the Caesar's. Much of Paul's writings dealt with Christian attitudes and responsibilities to the state. And the final New Testament writing, the book of Revelation, was written as an apocalyptic message in a time when the world was insecure for Christianity because of political persecutions. Don't tell me politics and religion don't mix! The evidence in the Bible is to the contrary.

What then should be our attitude and relationship to civil authority? What is our responsibility toward the government?

That we are colonists of heaven doesn't remove our obligation to take seriously our relationships with people, groups, and institutions in this world. If anything it intensifies it! For God appointed the government as well as the church to fulfill his purposes, and we must exercise our civil responsibilities as Christians. Since we have the privilege of living in a democratic republic, our role is not so much submission, as in an authoritarian state, but cooperation, for in a democratic state the duty of the citizen is not only to submit to be ruled, but to take the necessary share in ruling. Indeed, as Christians we need to permeate every phase of life, including the government, with the basic spiritual and moral tenets of our faith. We can make unique contributions to life in these United States by exercising our responsibilities as Christians to insure justice and mercy in civil matters. We can exercise Christian discretion in selecting candidates and electing officers on all levels who represent the highest standards possible. On moral issues we can speak and vote in a manner that best exacts decency by Christian standards. We can help promote the general welfare of our citizenry by supporting educational, medical, and welfare improvements. And we can pray: for peace, for continued freedom, for national unity, for our leaders, and for our children who are the future of the world! We can make positive contributions to our nation and world if we will, as Christians exercise our civil responsibilities.

Finally, the way of the pilgrim means exercising responsibility toward God in this world (v.16-17).

Living a good moral life and obeying the laws of the state were not enough. Peter also reminded his

readers of their ultimate responsibility to God. The Christian was not to obey moral and civil laws in a servile spirit, but as free men who obeyed because they so chose, and who so chose because of their primary allegiance to God. For the Christian pilgrim had a higher obligation than to the self and state alone. While he must "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," he must also "render unto God the things that are God's." This was not an unsolvable paradox, even though there were times of conflict with the state or commonly accepted mores. For nowhere is it written that human ordinances can't change. The opposite is true; they change constantly. And the Christian may remain loyal to a state authority even while in higher loyalty he resists those in office who assume divine prerogatives or deliberately use the state for purposes contrary to the God who provides for the state. The Christian is first and last a Christian, and in the light of absolute loyalty is a patriot who is responsible to God to conform the state or mores to God's higher purposes. The Christian is free, not to exercise his liberty in immorality, but free to do as he ought, a freedom always conditioned by responsibility to God.

Peter's conclusion to the duties of the earthly pilgrimage was fourfold. To honor all men meant to recognize the worth of every individual. To love the brotherhood meant to practice a genuine affection for all who are in Christ. Above all else, Christians are to fear God, not in abject dread, but in holy reverence. To honor the king meant to be a loyal citizen, even if the emperor was Nero. These were the divine obligations for which the believers were responsible to God.

At a dinner party at the Astor House in New York during the administration of President Millard Fillmore, Daniel Webster, the then Secretary of State, was asked, "Mr. Webster, what was the most important thought you ever had?" He pondered a few moments, then replied, "The most serious thought that ever occupied my mind was that of my responsibility to God."

Is there a more sobering thought than that we are individually responsible to God? This is our highest calling. We may just pass through this world as pilgrims, but our passing is not insignificant. Every thought, word, deed is accountable to God. Let us make the most of life by living in such relationship to him as to fill each action with meaning. Let us live at all times as servants of God.

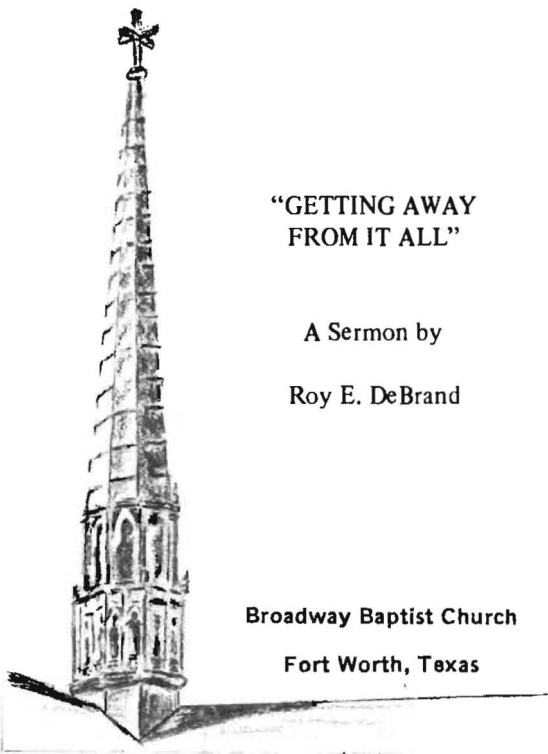
Beloved, our task as Christians is to live as citizens of two worlds, heaven and earth. In order to

resolve the tensions this sometimes causes, we need balance. This balance is achieved when we live responsibly in this world even though we are destined for a higher one. We must exercise responsible moral influence. We must maintain civil responsibility. We must live first and foremost for God. We must exercise all our Christian responsibilities as pilgrims in this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to this task, for by doing so we can fulfill what God desires of us as we walk the way of the pilgrim.

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**"GETTING AWAY
FROM IT ALL"**

A Sermon by

Roy E. DeBrand

**Broadway Baptist Church
Fort Worth, Texas**

Vol. XII August 20, 1972 No. 7

Scripture Reference: Mark 6:31-32;
Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:24; et al

The United States Armed Forces have a marvelous new weapon to combat sagging troop morale due to the rigor and routine of military life. It is known as "R and R," which stands for "rest and recuperation." Here's how it works. About half way through a soldier's tenure in a war zone or other hazardous or isolated assignment, he is allowed ten days to two weeks away from duty and danger in an exotic place such as Honolulu, Tokyo or Bangkok. There he can do just as he pleases — relax, live it up, perhaps be with his family, anything he wants to do; in fact, anything to forget about the military. Then, when he returns to duty he is rested and recuperated and ready to complete his assignment as a better soldier and a generally happier person. The military has discovered in the "R and R" a principle which applies in every area of life: that there are times when it is best to get away from duty and responsibility to rest and recuperate.

This principle applies as well in Christianity, for our faith is extremely concerned with effective living, and living effectively demands periodic retreats for personal and spiritual renewal. One cannot live well in the world unless he occasionally rises above the world. And this means sometimes getting away from everything – job, home, telephone, even other people – for a season of solitude. We don't need protracted periods of solitude, for this would not be healthy and probably not even possible. But we do need enough to maintain personal and spiritual perspective. The problem is that we often don't get any. The demands the world places upon us allow little, if any, time alone. And I maintain that we must have it if we are to live the quality of life God expects of us.

Jesus practiced the principle of getting away occasionally, and no one ever lived more effectively before God or man than he! The text for my message is drawn from several verses in the Gospels, each related to a well known incident in Jesus' life and all saying basically the same thing: that Jesus' personal and spiritual strength was renewed through periodic retreats. Look, for instance, at the feeding of the five thousand, the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. Following the beheading of John the Baptist, Jesus invited his disciples to "come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile," for they did not even have time to eat for the demands the public placed upon them (Mark 6: 31-32). But the people rushed into the wilderness ahead of them, and there Jesus miraculously fed them. After the miracle, "when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come he was there alone" (Matthew 14:23). Following that period of solitude, Jesus rescued his disciples from peril on the sea by miraculously walking to them on the water (Mark 6:48). On another occasion, following a run-in and discourse with a group of antagonistic Pharisees, Jesus "went away into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house, and would not have anyone know it; but he could not be hid" (Mark 6:24). His discovery led to the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter, following which he returned to the hills along the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 15:29). Again, after Jesus

had healed a leper, "great multitudes gathered to hear and be healed of their infirmities. But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:15-16). Then, there was the time Jesus led the inner core of disciples high into the mountains where he was transfigured before them and received the blessing and power of God the Father (Matthew 17:1-8). And finally, with Calvary just over the next hill, Jesus withdrew into Gethsemane's garden to pray and receive strength for the agony ahead (Luke 22: 41-44).

In each of these passages we see that Jesus' personal and spiritual strength was renewed by the period of retreat. And I maintain that we should follow his example by sometimes seeking a refreshment of our strength by simply getting away from it all. This is not a plea for an easy escapism from the harsh realities of daily living. The psychologists remind us that such an avenue is pathological. Too often today men seek escape down the easy roads of fantasy or rationalization until they become Walter Mittys, building castles in the air and living in a dream world where wishes never materialize. Or they seek release through drink or drugs until they are enslaved by what they thought would free them. No, the kind of retreat manifest in Jesus' life and called for in ours is the kind that helps us to find ourselves in relationship to God and the world, rather than lose ourselves from them.

Our faith demands that we master the art of retreat for renewal. Retreat alone is not enough. There is nothing inherently spiritual about solitude. If it renews and refreshes us spiritually, it must be made to. So we must dedicate ourselves to finding the time to get away for personal and spiritual renewal. We must, for the sake of Christ in us, cultivate the habit of getting away from it all. There are two very basic reasons for this.

First, it is necessary sometimes to get away from it all.

Jesus found this to be a necessity in his life. When the news of the death of his friend and spiritual forerunner John the Baptist reached him, he needed some time alone. But the demands of

the people were such that he could not find it. When he had miraculously met their needs, he again withdrew into the mountain alone, still feeling the necessity of solitude.

At other times Jesus found it necessary to do something first for himself before he could do much for others. This was the case when he had healed the leper and was immediately confronted by multitudes who also needed healing. He took time out to be alone, to think and pray, lest the overwhelming needs of the people actually overwhelm him. Again, there were times when the demands of his task on earth led him to feel the necessity of seeking divine guidance and strength. When he prayed in the garden he asked God, if possible, to let his responsibility to be offered as a sacrifice pass from him. But knowing that this was not possible, he resigned himself to the fulfillment of God's will. Oh yes, in Jesus' life there were times, many times, when it was necessary to get away from it all — people, needs, responsibilities, obligations — and be alone.

It is also necessary for our personal and spiritual well being to sometimes get away from it all. It doesn't have to be far away, just far enough to insure freedom from interruption. And it doesn't even have to be totally alone. Jesus often took his disciples with him. But it does have to be for the purpose of renewal, for this we must have to live effectively. As Christians we must give our best self to the world in God's service. But without occasionally getting away from other things to find renewal for spiritual things, we may find that we do not have a best self to give, only a feeble self exhausted by the demands of a world too much with us. It is necessary to take time to think things out from a distance, to commune with God in prayer, to seek spiritual rejuvenation through the scriptures. And such time must indeed be taken, it will not just happen. The press of life makes no convenient season for spiritual retreat. Jesus didn't wait until he was "caught up with things" to go into the mountains alone. He did it when he was most needed by others, for that was when he needed the time with God the most. And the times which call for our best effort and energy are exactly the times we

most need to be with our Source of energy and power. That is when it becomes necessary for us to get away from it all.

Near Lakeland in central Florida, there is a beautiful wildlife sanctuary surrounding the famous Bok Singing Tower. Under a shade tree in my favorite part of the garden is a little sign which says, "I come here to find myself; it's so easy to get lost in the world." Let us indeed take the necessary time to find ourselves in relationship to God, for it is so easy to get lost in the world!

Second, getting away from it all empowers us for more effective living.

Jesus' formula for effectiveness was no secret to those who carefully analyzed his life. It was his unique relationship with God that empowered him to live as he did. When the demands of the crowds exhausted him and pushed his personal power to the outer limits, he sought rejuvenation through refuge. He came down from his mountaintop communion so radiant with power that he walked the stormy waves and stilled the winds! When his spiritual strength was strained by the struggles of Saviorhood he retreated for renewal, and was transfigured by God's glory. And when the cross loomed large on the horizon and death was certain, he gained strength in Gethsemane's garden to die as he had lived, in love and forgiveness. No, it was no secret that by getting away from it all Jesus was empowered to live, and die, effectively.

Fosdick described our generation by three characteristics: externalism, immediacy, and noise. By externalism he meant that we are pressed upon from without by things, by immediacy that our minds are set on tasks immediately to be done, planned today and finished tomorrow so that life is marked by urgency and speed, and by noise he meant the obvious, the one almost inescapable characteristic of our age. These characteristics invade our lives until we actually judge everything in terms of size, speed and sound. But we need something more than these to live effectively, we need inner power and resourcefulness. And the deep sources of our power are not in the world's exter-

nalism, immediacy, and noise, but far away from them. We must get away from the shallow, hurried, noisy world and find the power that comes from the knowledge and fellowship of God's presence. Mere busyness is not enough! We must develop a deep, inward communion with God from which comes peace, power and radical renovation of personal character. And this takes time, time alone with God, time to think and pray until God's will and God's power become ours.

One day, in a wistful mood because of the many demands on that day's time, I wrote these lines:

I'd like some time to be alone with me,
to be, and do, and think, and read and see
what all the possibilities could be,
if I had time to be alone with me.

I'd like to read a book past chapter one.
or see a task through thoroughly till done,
or have a conversation without pause,
or do someone a kindness without cause.

I'd like to know what nature's all about,
or find a treasure someone's been without,
or travel 'round and take my jolly time,
or reach the utmost height a man can climb.

I'd like to see my family well and grown
or reap a harvest from some seed I'd sown,
or help a family desperately in need,
or teach a grown-up person how to read.

I'd like to think a thought that's new and vital,
or study without thought of praise or title,
or have some time to meditate alone,
or write a poem without the ringing phone.

I'd like some time to be alone with me,
to be, and do, and think, and read and see
what all the possibilities could be,
if I had time to be alone with me.

The fact is, we have all the time in the world. It is what we do with it that counts. And if we took time to get away occasionally from the externalism, immediacy, and noise of our world and seek the

stillness through which God's presence is known, he would empower us to live more effectively in every area of life. Let us seek the knowledge of God in solitude so that we may practice the presence of God in society!

One thing remains to be said. While it is true that Jesus often retreated to renew his strength in solitude he always returned to fulfill his responsibility in service. He never stayed on the mountaintop. He found it necessary sometimes to go there and get away from it all, and there he was reempowered. But he was always reempowered for life in the valley, never to remain in seclusion or retreat.

Many of us have had the great mountaintop experiences that come when we get away from the harsh realities of our noisy world and commune with God in nature. We have known the euphoric experiences of Glorieta, Ridgecrest, camps and retreats. And I maintain that these are good and necessary in our total Christian experience. But the closeness we feel to God in those times is for the purpose of reempowering us for the world we live in day by day. Therefore, let us continue to cultivate the high art of retreat for renewal, for effective Christian living demands it. But let us remember that this is not an end in itself, but a means to finding ourselves in relationship to God and his world. And herein is the ultimate mystery of the mountaintop, that whenever we withdraw to be alone, we are not alone!

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