

Highways To Happiness

“Sure, our home is in this town! We ain’t got no house for it yet, but papa’s building one.” The house is seen, the home unseen.

There is an unseen force running the motors of our factories and lighting our houses—we call it electricity. We enjoy its blessings, even though we cannot tell just what it is.

No, we have not seen God; but we have seen His handiwork in leaf and flower, in snowflake crystal and fairy rainbow, in grain-laden fields and golden sunsets.

I have always felt that I was taking no risk in believing, but there surely is a risk in doubting. I have nothing to lose by believing in God, but I dare not think what I may lose if I should deny His existence.

When Georges Eugene Benjamin Clemenceau died, all the world paused to mark the passing of the “Tiger of France.” He did not believe in life after death, and to the end would not permit prayers to be offered for him. “Let me die before men,” he said;

“I want no women, and I want no tears.” As he neared the end he asked his nurse to leave the room, and requested his chauffeur to go to the cemetery at Vendee to dig his grave in the family plot. He expressed the wish that no public funeral be held, and that he be buried as quickly as possible after death. “Let me be carried in the silence of daybreak to my Vendean forest,” he requested, “and there, beside the coffin of my father, let mine be placed, upright, like his. Even in death I wish to remain standing.”

At his request his body was not embalmed and was dressed in his everyday clothes. Inside the casket were placed his cane, a bit of soil from the battlefield of Verdun, a vase made from a German shell, which contained a small bouquet of faded flowers that had been given him by a man near the battle line. Just before noon on the day after his death he was laid to rest in a plain grave without pomp or ceremony, in the quiet little cemetery of Vendee.

He laid down his burden with no expectation of a resurrection or of an afterlife. He entered the “valley of the shadow of death” alone and without hope or comfort.

Contrast his dismal prospects with the certainty of the prophet Job, who expressed his confidence so beautifully and with such unfailing faith and assurance. “I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job 19: 25-27.

As finite mortals, there are some things we do not understand. We must accept them by faith.

Augustine, who lived in the fifth century, often resorted to the seaside for meditation and prayer. With the old ocean rolling in and the white-capped waves breaking at his feet, he pondered on sacred things. One day as he walked along the beach his face wore a serious look. His heart was troubled over the doctrine of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He reasoned and he studied, but could not understand how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could be one. His finite mind could not comprehend it. For a moment his attention was turned from this problem by the sight of a happy little boy carrying water from the great, turbulent ocean with a sea shell, and pouring it into a hole he had dug in the sand a short distance from the sea. The little fellow made trip after trip with his sea shell full of water. Curious to know the purpose of all this childish activity, Augustine inquired, “What are you doing, my little man?”

Without any hesitation the boy replied, “Oh, I am trying to put the ocean into this hole I have made.”

The monk felt as if a burden were suddenly lifted from his heart. The child had taught him an important lesson. After a few kind words to the busy lad, he walked on down the beach, saying to himself, “I see it now. I am standing on the shore of the great sea of time, and trying to get into this little finite mind of mine the things that are infinite.”

Have we tried to do that? Are we willing to take God at His word, and have Him know some things which our minds cannot comprehend? Shall we try to reason out some of the deep things of life, and allow doubt to come into our hearts because in our weakness we cannot solve all the problems of the universe?

5. Man’s Predictions

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THE HARDENED OLD CAPTAIN of the ironclad Merrimac was an unbeliever. For many years he had sailed the seas, and his association with wicked seamen had not softened his heart or lessened his unbelief. He had no respect for Christianity, no time to read the Bible, no faith in God. Years of exposure and hardship had left their marks upon him, and the old seaman had to forsake the sea for a quieter life. He found a refuge in a sailors' and soldiers' home. Here there were many others who had gone Mown to the sea in ships."

The chaplain, who had also been a man of the sea, tried to get the skeptical old captain to read portions of the Bible, but all his urging was in vain. One day he tried a new approach: "You begin reading here with the Book of John, and each time you find something you do not believe take this red pencil and mark out the verse." The chaplain's voice was persuasive.

The old captain had met many a challenge from wind and wave, but there was a new kind of hazard, and much to his liking. He reached for the Book, and promised to read. There was a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face, which indicated that he expected to vindicate his unbelief. There was no question in his mind but that he would show the chaplain a well-marked Book in a few days.

Each day as the chaplain made his rounds he paused at the old captain's door to inquire, "Well, captain, how are you getting on with your reading? Have you marked anything yet?" A smile would steal over the wrinkled face, but there would be no reply. Several times the same question was asked, and each time the chaplain was answered with only a pleasant smile.

A week passed by; then the chaplain stepped into the room one morning for a little visit and to ask again about the Bible and the marks, but there was no answer and no smile. The old captain was dead. The Bible lay open upon the coverlet. Where were the red marks? There was not a scratch or a mark in the first two chapters of John. - But the sixteenth verse of the third chapter was well underlined, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in the margin, in a trembling hand, had been written this note: "I have cast my anchor in a safe harbor. Thank God."

Like many a soul who has not read the Book, the old captain had doubted. But he had not read far until light broke through, and dispelled the clouds of unbelief. Joy came into his heart, a joy that only a sailor knows when reaching a safe haven after a stormy voyage.

Too many people have formed opinions, reached conclusions, and made decisions about the Bible without knowing much about the Book. Voltaire was one of those individuals. He declared that "in less than one hundred years Christianity will have been swept from existence and will have passed into history." Thomas Paine at one time predicted that in five years not a Bible would be found in the United States. Hume foretold the death of Christianity in twenty years, but the first meeting of the Bible Society in Edinburgh was held in the room where he died. It was another fulfillment of the declaration of Jesus, eighteen hundred years before. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Matthew 24: 35. It has come down to us through storm and bloodshed unsullied, and without loss of power. Floods of criticism and persecution have descended upon it, but like the ark upon the restless deep, it has ridden safely through the storm.

Last New Year's Eve I had the privilege of being with some Christian friends at Bok Tower in Florida. In the group was a Clean-cut, refined young man in his thirties. It was refreshing to be with him. Only a year before, this young man had been a drunkard. He told me that he had hardly known what it was to be sober. When he was under the influence of liquor he was mean and quarrelsome. His loved ones were mistreated; his home was neglected. Through the influence of a Christian who lived near by he began reading the Bible. As a result, his life was completely changed and his home transformed. He is a wonderful example of what the Bible will do for a sinner.

A woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown went to consult a famous physician. She told the doctor her symptoms, and there was a long list of them. The doctor listened to her story, asked a few questions, rose from his chair as if to dismiss her, and said, "What you need, madam, is to read your Bible more!"

"But, doctor," the bewildered and half-angry patient began.

"Yes, you go home, and read your Bible one hour a day for a month. Then come back to see me again!" He bowed her out without an opportunity for her to say more.

She felt resentful as she turned to go. But on thinking the matter over she decided the prescription was not expensive and surely would do her no harm. She was a church member, but social obligations and her business and home duties had taken her time so that she had not been reading her Bible. Worldly cares

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had crowded out prayer and missionary work. When she got home she rearranged her program and began to study her Bible regularly and to take time for prayer. It was a wonderful experience.

One month later she was back at the doctor's office.

"Well," said the doctor as he quickly glanced at her face, "I see you have been following my prescription. Do you feel that you need any medicine now?"

"No, doctor, I don't," she said frankly; "I'm a different person. But how did you know what I needed?"

Turning to his desk and picking up his well-worn Bible, he said with earnestness, "If I were to omit my daily reading of this Book, I should lose my greatest source of strength and skill. I never go to the operating room without reading my Bible. I never attend a distressing case without first seeking help from its pages. Your case called for sources of peace and strength outside your own mind, and I knew my prescription would help you."

"But I must honestly confess, doctor, that I came very near not trying it."

"Few are willing to try it," said the physician, "but there are so many, many cases where it will work wonders."

Thomas L. Masson, a well-known publicist, said: "I read the Bible two hours a day.... I began by reading fifteen minutes a day, and this increased my general efficiency so much that I soon found I could give up an hour and lose nothing, but gain. Then I found I could give up another hour.

"The Bible is the best business text-book there is. It makes you cheerful, persistent, honest, and gives you the kind of an understanding that looks through a superficial proposition into the source. It gives you the spiritual power to know how to be provided all the time with the right equipment to carry on your work, and nothing superfluous. Superfluous possessions cause a lot of trouble. I secretly long for them, and know that when I do, I am in the flesh.' Real substance comes from God, and it always comes when needed. Read Deuteronomy, 5th chapter, or Matthew, 5th chapter.

"I read the Psalms through every month, according to the prayer-book schedule, which I find the best for the purpose. In connection with this, I read one chapter of the Old Testament, one chapter of the synoptic Gospels, and one chapter of an epistle, with the commentaries. By this I mean that I look up the references as I go along.

Sometimes, in two hours, I never get further than one verse; then the others have to wait. But I read the daily assignment of the Psalms first, so I won't miss any. There is nothing like the Psalms as a spiritual gyroscope."-Literary Digest, March I, 1930.

The Bible will give us wisdom and understanding. "From a child thou has known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus!" 2 Timothy 3: 15. Reading the Bible will increase our faith. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17.

It will serve as a guide in showing us the right way. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119: 105. It will clean up our lives. "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." John 15: 3.

It will bring joy to our hearts, make us happy. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Jeremiah 15:16.

It will help us to be overcoming in the hour of trial and temptation. "Because thou has kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Revelation 3: 10.

It will strengthen and nourish our souls. "But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Matthew 4: 4.

The study of the Bible will help to fit our characters for citizenship in the kingdom of God. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." James 1:21. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts 20: 32.

It is the one book which tells us what truth is, and reveals the meaning of the unusual times into which we have come. It points out the right way, and helps us to walk in that way. It strengthens us for the trials and hardships of the way, and helps us to overcome our natural tendencies to evil. It brings joy to our hearts as we grow in grace, as we gain victories over the evil one, and as we seek to help those about us.

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Reading the Bible feeds our spiritual selves, and helps us to pattern our lives after the blueprint left us in the Book. It will enable us through Christ's help finally to overcome, and to perfect characters which will admit us into God's eternal kingdom. No other book will do that for us.

6. Staying Through

IN WORLD WAR II, after the surrender of the Belgians in 1940 to the German advance, the British front was left unsupported. Unable to make a connection with the French on the south, the British fell back toward Dunkirk on the Straits of Dover, leaving behind an enormous quantity of war material. The Axis powers, following up their advantage boasted their intentions of destroying the flower of the British Army. At the mercy of this relentless foe, the British fought a rearguard action, some of their finest battalions sacrificing themselves to cover the retreat.

On arriving at the Dunkirk beach, thousands of soldiers waded out into the water, hoping to see through the mist the outlines of their evacuation vessels. The Allied peoples around the world hovered near their radios, or eagerly, intently, nervously read their papers. Those were tense, dark, discouraging hours. Every boat that could navigate the channel went to the rescue of the harassed troops. Heeding not the concentrated bombing from hundreds of planes overhead and the bombardment from the heavy guns on shore, the boats pushed in to the beaches to save the British soldiers.

It seemed that nothing could live in this concentrated barrage of death. The full story of heroism, the bravery, and the suffering of that terrible time will perhaps never be told. It seems unbelievable that the enemy was not able to carry out his threat and annihilate the trapped, helpless soldiers scrambling for the tossing boats.

One episode of that last terrible morning deserves to be told and retold. Close to the gory waters of the pounding surf two British nurses were ministering to the wounded and dying. With backs bent over their suffering, helpless comrades, they did not notice that boats had come to rescue them. In constant danger from enemy fire they worked with their medicine and bandages. With death hovering around and above them, and weary from long hours of labor without food or sleep, they toiled dutifully on.

A commanding officer noticed them and ordered them into a boat. There were many reasons why they might have obeyed immediately. Their lives were in imminent danger, they were dead tired, and to disobey an army command was a serious offence.

Without even looking up, these two courageous girls shook their heads, and worked on. One took time enough to reply. "We are staying through," and stay they did till every wounded man in their care was either on a boat headed for England or dead.

The ability to stay through, to persevere to go on in the face of discouragement, may make the difference between success and failure. How often the difference between success and failure "is just a matter of time."

I felt that I was taking on quite a job one time when I started to paint our house myself rather than to pay a painter to do it. I am not a painter, but I thought I could do the job all right, if I took time enough. Just as I started to work, my young son, then aged five, appeared on the scene and wanted to help paint. I asked him whether he would not prefer to play and let me do the painting. No, he insisted that he wanted to paint, and that with his help the task would not take nearly so long. I found a small brush, and told him to paint the boards down low, where he could reach from the ground. I showed him how to rub the paint in and how to avoid laps in his painting. I climbed the ladder and began painting at the top. When I got down to move my ladder I found I was alone. My helper was gone. He had soon gotten all the painting he wanted. Many grown-ups are like my little boy. They give up before accomplishing anything.

Someone has said that Peter should have been the apostle to the American people, for it seems to be a trait with too many of us to start big, as if we would turn the world upside down and then peter out, lose heart, quit, and start some other project. We are children grown tall in this respect. Too many of us are good starters and poor finishers. In many a race a large group starts out, but only a few come in at the finish.

Pasteur, wearied by thousands of experiments, all of which seemed to have been time and money wasted, was almost discouraged; but before the light of hope flickered and went out entirely, he tried one