

Something To Hold On To

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10). “The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace” (Psalm 29:11).

James Black, formerly of Free St. Georges in Edinburgh, describes a trip he took through the tulip fields of Holland. He says that the beautiful beds of flowers were divided by canals which were crossed by foot-wide planks. As Dr. Black and his party visited the various beds of brilliant flowers they had to cross these little canals on the narrow planks. When they came to a canal that was twelve feet wide, they hesitated. The plank seemed so narrow. Would the owner of the field make a wider bridge for them across the canal? No. He blew a whistle and a man came and handed them a thin pole which made it easy to cross the canal on the narrow plank.

Dr. Black says that he then made a marvelous discovery. “How easily you can cross the narrowest plank if only you have something to hold on to.” You can go through life with all its tensions, all its uncertainties, and all its changes if you have something to hold on to. (From Pastor's Annual, by William Austin, p. 256)

Gods of Our Own Making

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1John 5:21). “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1Cor. 10:14). Years ago, men took pieces of wood or metal and carved or fashioned them into gods. They literally fashioned gods to meet their own fancy. Today, men in their own minds shape and fashion the true God into the god they prefer. They mentally chisel and carve away His wrath and severity making Him a god of love only. They mold and shape Him into a god that accepts the very things He once rejected. Thus, modern men in their own minds have fashioned their own god, and are no less guilty of idolatry than the people of long ago. Let us flee from all gods of our own devising.

Cracked Pots

The story is told of a water bearer in India who had two large, crockery pots. They hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck, but one of the pots had a crack in it. While the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots of water to his master's house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the ends for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you.”

“Why?” asked the bearer. “What are you ashamed of?”

“I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts,” the pot said.

In his compassion, the water bearer said, “As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path,

and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

It is an amazing thing that God is able to accomplish some wonderful things through our efforts, in spite of our imperfections. Paul said of his role as a preacher of the gospel: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2Cor. 4:7).

Though we may often feel inadequate and useless, if we will continue about the task that God has given us, we will produce fruit and influence lives in ways we may not even be aware. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1Cor. 15:58).

The Wisdom of the World

The following are ineffective daily affirmations:

- I have the power to channel my imagination into ever-soaring levels of suspicion and paranoia.
- I assume full responsibility for my actions, except the ones that I think are someone else's fault.
- My intuition nearly makes up for my lack of good judgment.
- I can change any thought that hurts into a reality that hurts even more.
- I honor my personality flaws, for without them I would have no personality at all.
- I am grateful that I am not as judgmental as all those hypercritical, self-righteous people around me.
- I need not suffer in silence while I can still moan, whimper and complain.
- The first step is to say nice things about myself. The second, to do nice things for myself. The third, to find someone to buy me nice things.
- Only a lack of imagination saves me from immobilizing myself with imaginary fears.
- Today I will gladly share my experience and advice, for there are no sweeter words than "I told you so."
- A good scapegoat is as welcome as a solution to the problem.
- Just for today, I will not sit in my living room all day watching TV. Instead I will move the TV into the bedroom.
- I will find humor in my everyday life by looking for people I can laugh at.
- I am willing to make the mistakes if someone else is willing to learn from them.

There's obviously not a single one of these affirmations that provides a foundation for healthy, successful living. So what can we affirm daily that will give us the strength we need to face the difficulties that each day brings? "Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ" (Acts 17:2-3). "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8).