
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

August 2, 2015

The Allure of a Defeated Life

"I was given a thorn in my body."
2 Corinthians 12:7 (Common English Bible)

Few things are as unfortunate than to see a woman or man losing heart and all sense of hope, drifting into apathy, and finally despair. When a sense of defeat is permitted to take residence in a life, frustration and inaction are too frequently the result. The face becomes sullen, the head is held low, and the shoulders sag. Bitterness grows, the result of an erroneous belief that life has dealt a raw deal or that others have received better opportunities. Left unchecked, the self-pity sentences them to low levels of achievement. A strange comfort is found in simply giving-up – experiencing a certain allure of being defeated.

History is replete with men and women who have experienced hardship, anguished over setbacks, and struggled with handicaps – physical, mental and emotional. Anyone of them may have been resentful and rebellious – and many have – with bad behavior the consequence. Yet, there are others who rise above the circumstances of their lives, press forward with unbelievable determination and consecrate their lives to the service of others. The apostle Paul stands among them. Paul moved through life hindered by “a thorn in the body” but produced nearly two-thirds of our New Testament.

Rather than giving-up and accepting defeat, Paul labored under his handicap. Naturally, Paul – like any of us – preferred that the handicap be corrected, the difficulty removed. On three occasions Paul asked the Lord for this. But the handicap remained; the thorn wasn't removed. But Paul's prayers were answered. “My grace is enough for you,” answered God. With God's answer, Paul committed himself to do the very best he could do with what he had. His life and ministry was a vessel of hope for everyone he encountered. To his children, Theodore Roosevelt continually cultivated a hopeful disposition – and in doing so charged the atmosphere of his home with hope.

Paul sought to demonstrate in his life that there is no limitation, no misfortune, no burden of sorrow, suffering or loss that the human spirit cannot rise above. He endured much of each. But Paul went deeper than self-discipline and self-determination. Paul triumphed over it all because he sought God. Perhaps this was the finest message that Paul left the church – that when the allure of defeat tempts the heart Paul calls us to that deeper place where our life is open to the grace and power of Almighty God.

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