In his work, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James employs the term "healthy mindedness." We are going to use this term as the theme of this lesson. To grasp the meaning of the term and the context in which we are examining it, let us turn it over and consider its opposite. William James calls it the "sick soul." It is common practice to refer to anyone whose behavior is eccentric or offensive as "sick." Let us say that the healthy mind is one which is self-controlled, while the sick mind is one which is unable to maintain mental and emotional control in the face of inner and outer stress. Although this is a simplification, for our purpose in this lesson, let's leave it there.

Are you overcome by fears? Are you crippled by frustration? Does resentment consume you? All of this indicates deviation from healthy mindedness. All of us are surrounded by complicated experiences and complex conditions in a sometimes very disturbing world. In his book, *The Ultimate Revolution*, Walter Starcke said that what is generally called human nature is really mankind's paranoid nature; and that human beings project their fears outside of themselves onto other persons, places, governments, and so forth; subsequently, they become controlled by these fears. Man has developed the concept of evil forces or demons of darkness operating around him and has become veritably obsessed by the supposed evil intentions of others. This is a most perceptive and valid observation.

For so many years, religion has dealt with man's paranoia, personalizing evil as "the Devil," and dwelling on "sin" as what is wrong with the world. Sigmund Freud followed this line, with far greater profundity and a much more sophisticated terminology. Following James' idea of the sick soul, sick mindedness is marked by the attitude that there is so very much wrong with other people and with the world in general. Healthy mindedness, on the other hand, asks what is right with other people and with the world in general.

There is, when you think about it, so much that is right with other people, with the world in general, and with one's very self. Healthy mindedness begins with the premise that the good is the reality, and that the less than good, as an object in itself, is simply that, less than good—it is an expression in and by any person which is less than his potential good. Turn in all you do to healthy mindedness. Begin to emphasize what is right with others and with the world, what is right with yourself, and you will suddenly be an optimist, not impractical and naive, but rather a person with deeper, truer knowledge of the human race.

For all of us there is a tremendous need for healthy mindedness, deluded as we have been that our thoughts have been produced by circumstances beyond our control. It has sometimes appeared that any upsets, fears, worries, and so forth are caused by outer conditions and other persons that we are upset, worried about or frightened of. But outside experiences and other people do not cause our thoughts. Abraham Lincoln observed that a man is about as happy as he makes up his mind to be. The healthy minded individual is ever cognizant that things may happen around him or directly to him, but that all that really counts are the things that happen in him; he knows with surety that in him is his own personal world of mind and that he can choose his thoughts and reactions in this realm.

The sick soul is so obsessed with life's problems and heartaches, how he has been mistreated, and all the misfortunes and injustices that have come upon him or upon his friends. He wallows in despondency, in the mire of inner turmoil of his own making. The healthy mind is pictured in a poem by Victor Hugo: "Be like the bird that, pausing in her flight while on boughts too slight, feels them give way beneath her, and yet sings, knowing that she hath wings." William James, recounting his own personal return to healthy mindedness from mental darkness, said that his salvation came when he realized that he had the freedom to choose his own thoughts; and as he
practiced selecting only those thoughts that were happy, loving, peaceful, sound, healthy, he gained in mental and emotional strength. Later, he asserted, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."

You can choose your thoughts, your reactions, in all things, commonplace and unexpected. Affirm what you desire to see manifested in your life. We choose our attitudes towards all things; we ignore some affronts, but are insulted and offended by others; we become angry because we meet some slight or other in anger rather than in love or in non-resistance. We claim to be so worried about world conditions, as if the conditions caused and created our worries, which in reality are the result of our subconscious determination that that is the way we will deal with these conditions. We all have an imaginary worry button, but the question is: Why push the button if worrying is going to upset our entire system and won't solve the problem anyway?

People are sometimes describes as moody; but everyone is moody in one way or another, and our moods set the tone and determine the theme of our experiences. A mood of discouragement or self pity or depression can invite havoc into our lives, and often does. Then, we regard our moods as if they were clouds that blow over and drift away and as if we bear no responsibility for them. Moods are the flowering of primitive emotions and bad intellectual habits. Since we have cultivated them, we can uproot them, change them. In the healthy minded approach, insist on retaining a mood of peace and joy and love. That is the practical way of keeping the light on in the darkness. It has been said that it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

This lesson has been about the old concept of the optimist and the pessimist. Perhaps it is only healthy mindedness that adequately defines optimism, and perhaps the pessimist is the poor, sick soul, the one who desperately needs to turn on his lights, so to speak. But, more than anything else, healthy mindedness is marked by the conviction that there is always a choice—man chooses his thoughts, his reactions to whatever happens; he can choose his moods. The healthy minded individual turns on his lights initially and keeps them on, no matter what others do, no matter what conditions are in the world, and is thus at all times able to see clearly and to think clearly and to react wisely, all the while the sick soul comes readily apart at the seams. I am not teaching that the world needs a lot of unreasoning pollyannas clinging to vain and reality-denying wishes; what I am teaching is that he who chooses to think positively, to make wise and good decisions and to face the world can make of any circumstance that which is in his own best interests and best interests of all people. In our unending search for political leadership, I would certainly want a Mayor or Congressman or President who is healthy minded as described here, who regards people and issues and his responsibilities on the basis of what is right rather than on what is wrong.

So, choose the mood you wear as your clothing for the day. Choose joy, faith, optimism. Choose to see the good in all people; close your eyes to evil. Choose to believe, as the poet Robert Browning in "Pippa Passes" says, "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world." Do not feel, like Chiken Little, that the world is falling down all around us. Become a healthy minded individual, and you will become a part of what's right in the world.