

Eric
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Speaks

Essay #24
KEEPING UP WITH YESTERDAY

On display at the Museum of Natural History here in New York City are a couple of dinosaur eggs. They are quite an attraction. Upon seeing them, I couldn't help thinking that the eggs had been laid millions of years ago, and here they are, still untouched. For their mother they represent total failure, for after the time and trouble it took her to lay them, they were never hatched--nothing ever came out of them. They are symbolic of yesterday's plans of which the fulfillment has been thwarted.

Looking at them in this way, we can all find dinosaur eggs in our lives--desires and ideals that have been postponed and neglected through procrastination. Jesus had something pretty definite to say about those who put their hand to the plow and then look back, "They are not fit for the Kingdom of God." Readers of the novels of Charles Dickens will remember the loveable character of Mr. Micawber and his well-known words, "Procrastination is the thief of time." Yet, he never profited from his own wisdom; he was always ready with ideals and theories that he never tried to execute, idling away his days waiting confidently for something to turn up.

Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday; it is the unconscious practice of keeping one's desires and opportunities as museum pieces, as dinosaur eggs that are never hatched. One may hold ideals, wishes, hopes, and plenty of good ideas, but sink under the challenge of overcoming inertia. It is easy to do nothing or to say, "I'll begin to diet tomorrow. Perhaps some miracle will happen. Perhaps something will turn up." Manana is a favorite time. A good, objective look at several causes of procrastination might help us identify and root out such tendencies in ourselves.

All of us experience exalted moments of inspiration, at which times we see greater possibilities for ourselves and resolve to pursue some course of betterment. But how often this course fades because we do not feel that we have enough to begin. William James once advised: "Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you aspire to gain." When an urge to do or to have something comes to us, we must get into our consciousness that it is but the vanguard of a train of ideas, abilities and substance--all that is needed to make the ideal a reality, the hope a fulfillment. The important thing is to get started; to begin is often half the battle. The indolent person pleads that he will start tomorrow; he forgets not only that tomorrow never comes, but also that tomorrow usually means never.

We can all list all manner of reasons why it just is not feasible now, at this time, to get started on some creative project or other. However, in most cases these excuses merely cover up a tendency toward procrastination, a mental habit of keeping up with yesterday. This must be changed; inertia must be overcome. Remember that when you procrastinate concerning what you would really like to do with the thought that it is impossible at the present time, you are simply hanging on to a consciousness of limiting thought, which keeps you in the past, which keeps you as you have been. The word "impossible" was called by Mirabeau "that blockhead word."

Experience tends to condition us to accept certain things as just the way things are, as the facts of life. And this is extremely limiting to us. Experience provides us with boundaries of endurance, of accomplishment. The desire to do is proof positive of the innate potential to do. Therefore, you must be willing to take steps to break the inertia; otherwise, you will simply continue to lay dinosaur eggs that will never hatch. Goethe wrote: "Are you in earnest? Seize this very moment; whatever you can do or dream you can. Begin it. Boldness has genius, power, magic in it." The procrastination habit is so subtle that we must look for little things you can do to break the inertial force.

We need to work to do things promptly, clearly, and systematically. It is important to be a good finisher. Letters half-written, the house half-cleaned up--

many of us have a multiplicity of half-accomplished projects and responsibilities. These are our own unhatched dinosaur eggs that create great pressures for us by their very unfinished existence. I suggest that you occasionally go through the clutter of your home or place of work and either discard these things or set up a firm schedule for their completion.

This leads us to think about another cause of procrastination--the oppressive feeling that we are hopelessly weighed down by all that we have to do. In our tense, strained existence so many of us are prone to become mentally uneasy because of the variety of our tasks. Things accumulate not only on our desks and in our closets, but also in our minds. Worrying about how to get them all started and completed, we start none. Thus, nothing gets done. Paul has given us the key, "But this one thing do I do." In Ecclesiastes we read, "For everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven." It is not possible to angle for fish and shoot deer at the same time; the man who tries to kill two birds with one stone, usually misses both.

In order to overcome procrastination we need to eliminate certain concepts from our minds, and one of them is "someday." "Someday, I am going to have a nice home, or a beautiful car, or I am going to take a trip abroad. Someday, I am going to be cured of this stomach trouble." Does this sound familiar? Strangely enough, even after we have caught the good news of the new insight in truth, we keep right on procrastinating with "someday." What is wrong with it is that it binds, it limits the one who practices it. It implies that God's idea, man, is lacking, that he is dependent upon external things, other men, other conditions, his physical self, the passing of time for his good.

If we want anything for ourselves we must accept it today, or we will never have it. There is no future tense in the eternal now of infinite mind. There will be no future time in which to know the truth or to make a demonstration. The only demonstration there is, ever was, or ever will be is God's...and that is right now! Determine that now is the time. Print that on a card and place it where you will be sure to see it every day. Charles Fillmore used to say that any time is a good time to start doing something about a good idea.

There are many a reason for a human being to procrastinate, but the results are always the same--a confused, disorderly, indecisive life, marked by incompleteness and frustration. If indolence or the pressures of seemingly overloaded days has developed for you the habit of putting off until tomorrow what should be done today, if you are postponing the good you desire by thinking that someday you will have it or someday you will get to it, if you are thus keeping up with yesterday and sitting on sterile dinosaur eggs, then start right now to obliterate the habit. Remember that there is nothing futuristic about your oneness with God: "Before Abraham was, I am."

Build on this realization, affirm your unity, your oneness--not as something you might have, but which is the very foundation of your life right now! In prayer seek to overcome the tendency to get things to happen tomorrow or someday. Do not treat to get better, treat for wholeness--now. Do not treat that you may find a job, but affirm that you are now in your right place. Do not pray that you may become the kind of person you want to be, but affirm that you are now God's perfect child and are endowed with all the potentialities to be--right now--what you desire to be. For a long time I have used for myself and have recommended for others this very interesting affirmation: "Divine order is established in my life and affairs. I think clearly and act decisively, and I'm prompt to do the things that should be done by me."