

GOD'S REMEDY FOR TENSION

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Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while (Mark 6:31).

It has often been said that eyes are the windows of the soul. it may also be claimed the words of a poet are the highways of his mind. A man may reside in a desolate area, his surroundings may be drab and gray, but his ability to rise above the ordinary suggests an eagle majestically soaring above storms. A true dreamer never encounters travel restrictions. He can climb mountains, explore valleys, be enthralled with a bird skillfully making its nest, or thrilled with lambs playing in a meadow. Without money or passport he can be a world traveler and never leave his home. Probably Jesus of Nazareth appreciated this fact. He loved the hills where the silence was unbroken except for the cry of a bird or the whisper of an angel. When the tension was great in the valley and the Lord and His friends had no time to enjoy a meal (see Matt. 6:31), the Savior went into the wilderness seeking rest and contemplation. Sometimes crowds of thoughtless people thwarted His plans, but as soon as it became possible, the Lord climbed the mountain to sit down with God. That was the secret of His unruffled confidence. He never became irritable nor shouted at an offending disciple. The poet captured that serenity when he wrote:

o Sabbath rest by Galilee,
o calm of hills above.
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity,
interpreted by love.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease.
Take from our lives the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.
Frederick C. Maker (1844-1927)

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It should always be remembered that even the best of God's servants are human. The most successful of His laborers may have "feet of clay." If a Christian makes a mistake, he is invariably condemned, when he needs understanding and sympathy. Paul expressed the mind of God when he wrote: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). A helping hand is better than a fist, a benediction more acceptable than a blow. When extreme tension overwhelms a worker, and the selfishness of critics devastates his soul, retaliation is often forthcoming. Unfortunately a lashing tongue does more damage in moments than can be repaired in months or even years. A walk in the countryside is better than a stay in the hospital or an argument in a court of law, When feelings are hurt and a desire to "get even" is evident, angry people should remember and accept the advice given in the spiritual:

Steal away; Steal away;
Steal away to Jesus.

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Steal away, steal away home;
I ain't got long to stay here.

The Concerned Preachers... Frustrated

And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).

The disciples were becoming apprehensive. Their sky which had been filled with the sunshine of expectation was overcast. The arrival of John's disciples, who described the execution of their master, seemed to be a warning of worse things to come. Herod, who boasted of the demise of one preacher, was now asking, "Who is this Jesus?" The disciples were worried. The news of the brutal killing of the wilderness evangelist filled them with grief. The continuing demands of the huge crowd were beginning to annoy the weary men. Thousands of

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strangers thought only of themselves and had no consideration for other people. It was impossible to prepare and enjoy a meal without interference. There was a limit to everything. The disciples were overworked, tired, and irritable. Then the Lord suggested a ride in a boat, and the idea was brilliant.

At last there was an opportunity to escape from the people who were causing all the trouble. Their Master understood the situation. The boat was launched, the sail set, and the journey to tranquillity commenced. Some of the men closed their eyes or gazed longingly at the distant hills. It was very relaxing until one of the party growled his disgust. He was watching the crowd running around the northern shore of the lake. The multitude would be awaiting their arrival. Smiles became frowns as the disciples recognized what was taking place. Why couldn't those folk go home? Had they nothing else to do than monopolize the Master's time? Jesus alone remained calm. His eyes reflected the compassion within His heart. He also was exceptionally weary but not too tired to respond to a mother begging healing for her child.

The Lord knew His followers needed rest, and although His immediate plan was ruined, as soon as it became possible He would lead His servants to another resting place. Blessed is the man who can choose between rest for himself and the privilege of helping others. Some unwise Christians, refusing to rest, hurry toward their grave. They not only burn a candle

at both ends, they invent means by which to burn it in the middle as well. Everyone needs to be reminded that Satan applauds such foolishness. The Evil One would be willing to send flowers to the funeral of any worker who, refusing to rest, shortens his life. When God gave brains to people, He expected them to be used!

The Criticized Patriarch... Furious

And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of

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gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written (Exod. 32:30-32).

With the exception of the Savior, Moses must be the most honored Bible character. People speak enthusiastically about Job, but this leader of Israel exhibited more patience than any other man. How he succeeded in leading a complaining nation through inhospitable territory for forty years is beyond comprehension. He appeared from nowhere, challenged the most powerful man in the world, demoralized a trained army, and rescued a nation of slaves. This story has inspired writers in all ages. Moses strengthened the desire for freedom, and under his guidance liberation was ultimately obtained. Yet, the ingratitude of the Hebrews beggared description, for at every opportunity they rebelled against leadership and accused Moses of interfering in their lives. Defiantly, they made a golden calf and danced naked before it. Their attitude was so disgusting that the patriarch became furious, and for one outburst of anger, that great man was prevented from entering Canaan. If he lived on earth today, Moses would be awarded the greatest honor known to man. When God offered to abandon Israel and make a new nation with him as its leader, the patriarch refused the offer and asked God to forgive his offensive brethren (see Exod. 32:10-11).

It is wise to remember that Moses was not an angel nor some other supernatural figure-he was a man acquainted with human weakness. This author has often confessed that had he been the leader of Israel, those unworthy people would have reaped the reward of their deeds! How that man remained calm amid such intolerable criticism defies explanation. Perhaps his simple statement, "I will go up unto the Lord," explains the secret of his success (see Exod. 32:30). When other leaders like James and John would have called fire from heaven (see Luke 9:54), Moses climbed the mountain and shared his problems with the Almighty. It is better to reflect than to rant and rave! When the healing power of God's grace began to fill the irritated soul of the distressed

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leader, peace became a reality. David knew something of this experience, for he wrote: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121:1).

The Confused Prophet... Fearful
And he [Elijah] came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? . . . And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here Elijah? (1 Kings 19:9, 13).

If Moses may be compared with the moon which shone in a dark sky, Elijah was a shooting star. His coming was unexpected. He left a fiery trail and then disappeared as quickly as he came. Yet he dazzled the people of his generation and earned an abiding place in history. After his sudden, but extraordinary, departure from this world, he was seen again speaking with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt. 17:3). His ministry did not terminate; he will be one of the two witnesses to resist evil in the closing days of time (see

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Mal. 4:5; Rev. 11:3).

His ministry cannot be forgotten, for he did the impossible. Elijah was truly a man of fire, whose exploits may be summa-

rized thus:

1. His Fiery Denunciation... Startling
2. His Fiery Display... Spectacular
3. His Fiery Departure... Saddening

He closed heaven for three and a half years so that no rain fell. He defied the prophets of Baal and brought a rebellious nation to its knees. He could have been the greatest evangelist of all time, but unfortunately he became scared of a woman, and his faith failed as he fled. After a journey of forty days and forty nights, he found a cave in the mountain and, stumbling into the darkness, believed his ministry had terminated.

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Then he discovered he had company. At first he was unaware that the Almighty was awaiting the arrival of his despondent servant.

... and, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? (1 Kings 19:13).

Standing in the mouth of the cave, the prophet saw the destructive power of the tempest as the wind rushed through the canyons, but his eyes remained bleak. When an earthquake rocked the foundation of the mountain, he trembled, but the awesome shaking left his soul unmoved. Then a soft and gentle whisper broke his resistance, and he fell into God's everlasting arms. He had destroyed his reputation as a fearless preacher, but neither he nor any other person could destroy the matchless love of God. A new beginning awaited him, and with fresh resolution gleaming in his eyes, Elijah descended the mountain. This is a lesson Christians need to learn. Every preacher at one time or another believes himself to be a failure. God did not shout at His forlorn servant. He whispered, and a dying spirit was rejuvenated. Jehovah is the Great Physician, capable of restoring health to a weary soul. The moral of this ancient story is easily understood:

Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
God will take care of you!

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