

***Christian Excellence: Alternative to Success*** by Jon Johnston, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI) 1996 (86 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

## **1. Excellently Vs. Incompetence**

An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher—John W. Gardner. (Page 21)

## **2. Great Men's Humble Beginnings**

- Cripple him, and you have a Sir Walter Scott. Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan.
- Bury him in the snow of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington.
- Raise him in abject poverty, and you have an Abraham Lincoln.
- Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes a Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham—who set the world's one-mile record in 1934.
- Deafen him and you have a Ludwig van Beethoven.
- Have him or her born black in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, a Marian Anderson, a George Washington Carver, or a Martin Luther King Jr.
- Call him a slow learner, “retarded,” and write him off as uneducable, and you have an Albert Einstein.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> (Quoted in Ted W. Engstrom, *The Pursuit of Excellence* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], p. 81.)  
(Page 24-25)

## **3. What is Excellence?**

What is excellence? It's a certain style of life, a manner of living, a bigness of spirit, a point of view, a frame of reference, a set of priorities, a hierarchy of values, an admirable self-imposed standard. (Page 25)

## **4. You Should Try to Achieve Excellence**

As John W. Gardner says, we cannot “expect every man to be excellent. . . . But many more can achieve it than now do. Many, many more can try to achieve it than now do. And the society is bettered not only by those who achieve it but by those who are trying.”  
(Page 25)

## **5. He who ceases to better ceases to be good**

On the inside cover of his Bible, Oliver Cromwell has penned, *Qui cessat esse melior cessat bonus* [He who ceases to better ceases to be good]. (Page 26)

## **6. People who have Immortal Knowledge Serve Christ**

It is particularly significant that Christ's people, who have tasted immortal knowledge, serve him with excellence.—J. Kenneth Grider (Page 45)

## **7. The Early Christian Church Conquered**

The early Christian church conquered because the Christians of those days out-thought, out-lived, and out-died the pagans.—T.R. Glover (Page 45)

## **8. More Said Than Done**

“After all is said and done, there's a lot more said than done.” (Page 53)

## **9. Education in Christian Excellence**

What T.H. Huxley said about education is true concerning Christian excellence. To paraphrase: It motivates us to do what we should do, when it should be done, as it should be done, whether it is convenient or not. (Page 53)

## **10. Helps Provided by the Apostle James**

Robert Murray McCheyne said it well: “A Christian is [one whose deeds] make it easy for others to believe in God.” What is implied? On one hand, our deeds must not offend. But our servantlike deeds must also intersect human need—in the name of the One who commanded us to give “cup[s] of cold water” (Matthew 10:42).

James provides a helpful list of examples:

- Preserve under trial (1:12)
- Be quick to listen and slow to anger (1:19)
- Refrain from showing favoritism (2:1)
- Care for the physical needs of others (2:15-18)
- Tame the tongue (3:7-8)
- Avoid fighting (4:1), adultery (4:4; i.e. “friendship with the world”), self-indulgence (5:5), grumbling against another, and swearing (5:12)
- Help those who have wandered from the truth (5:19-20).

## **11. God Takes full Responsibility**

God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.—Andrew Murry (Page 61)

## **12. God Wants Our Accessibility**

Rather than giving God our ability, he wants our accessibility.—Earl G. Lee. (Page 61)

## **13. Progress Means Taking Risks**

Behold the turtle who makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.—Cecil Parker (Page 61)

## **14. Excellent God Glorifying Life**

...We can develop a lopsided view of excellence. Attempting to love excellently in one area of our lives, we can neglect other important areas. In my survey, author John White was right in saying that Christian excellence “is not so much a matter of being superior at some specific activity, as much as [it is] living an excellent, God glorifying life.” (Page 64)

## **15. Love Penetrates and Saturates Every Thought**

Love must permeate all we do. Paul states, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). A life of excellence penetrates and saturates every thought, attitude, and action so that, as the song declares, “Jesus [is] the Lord of all the kingdoms of [our] heart.” (Page 64)

## **16. Cynthia R. Schaible, Her Gospel of Success**

Cynthia R. Schaible in her insightful *Eternity* article spells out the inherent dangers in the gospel of success:

- Excessively emphasizing the importance of a positive self-image, it ignores that we’re worth little apart from Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 2:20).
- The doctrine provides the tragic illusion that there is enough room at the “success peak” for everyone. It teaches that all believers with enough “name-it-and-claim-it” faith can become elite in this world.

- Rather emphasize the dynamic, revolutionary changes that take place in the life of the Christian, through our Lord, proponent of this attitude focus on the superficial changes that only after some behavior patterns, specifically the ones that are necessary to “get you ahead.”
- The doctrine inflates God’s promises so that they are made to include more than our needs (Matthew 6:8, 32).
- It deflates God’s blessings. They are perceived as related only to material things (Luke 12:22-23).
- The success gospel allows no room for God’s sovereign will, failing to recognize that sometimes God blesses, but more often, his blessings seem to mysteriously surface through suffering (1 Peter 4:12-14).
- This sensually appealing but counterfeit doctrine promotes an inevitable lack of sensitivity to responsible stewardship and with it a denouncement of authentic servanthood. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> (Cynthia R. Schaible, “The Gospel of the Good Life,” *Eternity*. February 1981. p. 21) (Page 65)

## **17. Christians Motive for attaining Excellence**

What is the best motive for attaining excellence in our life as a Christian? Put simply, **it is seeking to glorify God.** (Page 66)

## **18. Jerry Bridges Summarizes Christian Excellence**

“Christian excellence is the quality of life that results when a Christian seeks to live out every area of his life with the aim of pleasing . . . and glorifying God. He is worthy of our most diligent efforts.” (Page 66)

## **19. Look at Jesus Christ**

Robert Murray McCheyne says, “For every [one] look at [ourselves, we should] take ten of Jesus Christ.” (Page 68)

## **20. Jesus is the Embodiment of God’s Written Lesson**

God’s written lesson, as clear and helpful as it is, could not suffice. Our world needed a perfect embodiment of God’s love. Our Lord is that embodiment. Because of him we have hope. The early church realized this. As E. Stanley Jones said, they “did not say in

dismay; ‘Look what the world has come to,’ but, in delight, “Look what has come into the world!” Today we share that same hope. (Page 68)

## **21. Many speak of Jesus as a character in a one-dimensional soap opera**

Edward Kuuhlman put it well:

Many speak of Jesus as if he were a character in a flat one-dimensional soap opera. Jesus comes with manicured nails and razorcut coiffure. He comes as one of the Osmonds with teeth straight, white, and free of cavities. He comes as an Emmy winner with chest hair showing through the open shirt front, a gold chain encircling his tanned throat. Of course, he’s wearing Jordache jeans.

This is not the kind of excellence he possessed. Rather Jesus was the supreme combatant of satanic power, described in Hebrews as the One who “learned obedience from what he suffered” (5:8), the “author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame” (12:2). We are invited to “consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that [we] will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:3) (Page 68)

## **22. Jesus, a constant worrier against evil**

He was by no means, a softy. Instead he was engaged in a constant and agonizing fight against the powerful forces of evil. But through it all he remained excellent, loving the “unlovable.”

Unlike others considered great in history, he provided a living example. He is more than a reference point in the past—One who taught valuable insights; one who exemplified what he taught. Our Savior died for our sins, the just for the unjust, so that we might be reconciled to God in our lifetime. But even more than this, he rose again to saturate us with his presence every moment (Galatians 2:20)—to take the place of what we are. As W. Ian Thomas put it, “His *strength* for our *weakness*! His *wisdom* for our *folly*! His *drive* for our *drift*! His *grace* for our *greed*! His *love* for our *lust*! His *peace* for our *problems*! His *plenty* for our *poverty*! A living example. (Page 69)

## **23. Technology made our lives Godless**

Technology has inundated our planet with gadgets and conveniences. As someone declared, it has made dentistry painless, bicycles chainless, carriages horseless, laws enforceless, cooking fireless, telegraph wireless, coffee caffeineless, birth weanless, oranges seedless, putting greens weedless, roads dustless, steel rustless, tennis courts sodless—and in so doing, our lives godless.

Our world needs people who excel in reflecting God’s love more than it needs advanced technology. (Page 70)

## **24. Ten Thousand people starve to death each day**

When two-thirds of the people who have ever lived are presently living, when more than one billion are starving to death (ten thousand each day). (Page 71)

## **25. The Gospel transforms and give a new way of life**

Wade Coggins, executive director of Evangelical Foreign Missions, Association, spoke the truth: “We must demonstrate through Christian excellence that the gospel transforms and gives a new way of life. If our words are not backed up by such excellence we will lose the attention of the world. and fail to bring then to Christ. (Page 71)

## **26. We should be Comforters**

God does not comfort us only to make us comfortable—rather he does it to make us comforters—Navigator’s Daily Walk Bible. Page 77)

## **27. Let the other fellow have the Blessing**

If it is more blessed to give than to receive, then most of us are content to let the other fellow have the greater blessing.—Shailer Mathews. (Page 77).

## **28. Grow in Servant-hood**

Grow in servant-hood:

- inalienably possessed by God
- unqualifiedly at the disposal of God
- unquestionably obedient to God
- constantly in the service of God

William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter. pp. 345-46. (Page 79)

## **29. No one to play second, no Harmony**

Leonard Bernstein was once asked, “What is the most difficult instrument to play?” Without hesitation he replied, “Second fiddle.” Then he explained, “I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays *second* violin with as much enthusiasm or *second* French horn or *second* flute, now that’s a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony.” (Page 81)

### **30. Sacrifice pace setters produce resentment in others**

People who set the pace with sacrifice are resented the most because they produce guilt in those who realize their own shortcomings. (Page 84)

### **31. Caring for others' and doing something about it**

God wants to sensitize us to the hurt he feels when he sees human suffering. Being his servant means accepting his heartbreak, deeply caring for others' pain and suffering, and doing something about it. (Page 88)

### **32. I wonder by Ruth Harms Calkin**

Ruth Harms Calkin has written a poem entitled "I Wonder." Desiring to follow our Lord example, we will answer yes to its closing question!

You know, Lord, how I serve You  
With great emotional fervor  
In the limelight.  
You know how eagerly I speak for you  
At a women's club.  
You know how I effervesce when I promote  
A fellowship group.  
You know my genuine enthusiasm  
At a Bible study.

But how would I react, I wonder  
If you pointed to a basin of water  
And asked me to wash the calloused feet  
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman  
Day after day  
Month after month  
In a room where nobody saw  
And nobody knew.

Ruth Harms Calkin

(Page 89)

### **33. Enough for everyone's need but not Greed**

The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed—  
Mahatma Gandhi. (Page 91)

### **34. Experts Never Agree**

As someone remarked, “If you line up all the world’s experts, end to end, they’d never reach a conclusion” (Page 93)

### **35. God wants our weakness not our ability**

Paul informed the Corinthians that they weren’t nearly as great as they thought. In addition, he said that for his critical assignment God often used people thought to be insignificant. In the apostles words, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise . . . the weak things . . . to shame the strong . . . the lowly . . . and the despised things . . . so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

We are inclined to think God chooses “big names” to do important jobs. So we showcase celebrities who are Christians: baseball stars, politicians, beauty queens, millionaires. The Corinthians thought the same way. But Paul disagreed. He knew that our Heavenly Father uses little people. His key point: It’s our weakness God wants, more than our strength, our accessibility, more than our ability. (Page 94)

### **36. The “loose grasp” John Wesley**

I’ve always been impressed by the “loose grasp” John Wesley had on things. It wasn’t that he made little money. He earned more than most people of eighteenth-century England. Rather, his secret is contained in his philosophy of money: “Money and I have never been the closest of friends. The truth is, we are scarcely passing acquaintances. I’ve always made it a practice to make all I can to save all I can to give all I can.”<sup>6</sup> And give he did—to the education of ministers, construction of churches, betterment of the poor. His standard of living was never raised, so that each increase in salary meant more money for God’s causes.

<sup>6</sup>This quote is translated from a taped performance of D. Paul Thomas, who dramatized Wesley’s life in a play entitled *A Heart Strangely Warmed*. (Page 96-97)

### **37. Increased Giving by Christians**

What good would result if Christians shared even 10 percent more than they do currently. Christians worldwide annually earn 6.5 million dollars and own two-thirds of this planet’s resources. Their average income is \$4,500 per year, three times that of non-Christians. But, there are more than two hundred million Christians in the grip of poverty. Increased generosity on our part would help these and non-Christians who suffer so greatly. [Statistics are from the *World Christian Almanac*.] (From footnote Page 98)

### **38. The Delights of Our Heart**

David tells us to “delight [ourselves] in the Lord and he will give [us] the delights of [our] heart” (Psalm 37:4). And when we do purposely delight, it is miraculous how God transforms our desires. We begin wanting most what we most need: his presence in our life. Our genuine thankfulness allows him to generously fill us with that presence. (Page 99)

### **39. Biblical Simplicity Defined**

Simplicity is, indeed, our biblical ideal, but not the kind which demands rubber-stamp sameness. What is simple to one may be complex to another. Nevertheless, some suggestions might be helpful, provided we prayerfully adapt them to our unique circumstances. The suggestions fit into two categories: internal and external simplicity.

#### **Internal Simplicity**

- Find time each day to humbly meditate upon God’s Word and seek his guidance in fervent prayer.
- Fast at least once a week, without telling others. Use the money for a good cause and the time for meditation.
- Periodically make a thank-you list to God, enumerating recent blessings, whether they be great or small.
- Construct another list of requests that, by faith, you believe God is responding to.
- Read one good Christian book each week. Balance your reading list with books that challenge as well as books that comfort.
- Write something in your spiritual diary each day. It can be in the form of a letter to God.
- Practice the presence of Christ. Imagine that Jesus is by your side throughout the day. Begin with one hour, then gradually increase your time of awareness.
- Ask a trusted Christian friend to tell you of your faults in a spirit of Christian love. Reject the temptation to be defensive or discouraged. Realize that God offers to be your partner in improvement.

- Cultivate the ability to truly worship every moment you are in a worship service. Fervent prayer, concentrating on the words of songs and taking notes on sermons can be helpful.
- Memorize key passages in God’s Word or the words of inspirational hymns.
- Strive to glean a spiritual lesson out of situations that occur in the course of a day (e.g., at the laundromat, concentrate on the importance of “washing” in the Scriptures).

### **External Simplicity**

- As often as God leads, give away something to which you are strongly attached. Preferably, you should give anonymously to someone in need.
- Give a faith gift (beyond your means) to God’s kingdom, whether it be to a church, Christian college, or missionary cause. Promise God that amount when (not if) he provides it—believing that he will.
- Continually suggest ways that your church can be less “building and facility conscious” and be more “people conscious.” If people do not respond, dare to reapportion your church giving as an example.
- Refuse to purchase gaudy luxuries for the sake of being “seen of men.” Do not reject buying quality items, but reject fads and overpriced brands.
- Plan to use cars, clothing, and appliances for a longer period of time. Much that is to be out of date is perfectly usable.
- Do more bicycle riding and walking. It is healthy and sets an example for being a good steward of God’s resources.
- Minimize your reliance upon costly, empty-caloried junk food. Also, in regard to meat, favor that which swims [fish] and has wings [chicken]. Reasons: health and cost.
- Dedicate one “big-gift” day [e.g., birthday, Christmas] to others in need. Instead of exchanging with another, or receiving many presents from others, request all parties to give to a needy cause.
- Make it known to all family members that you are willing a substantial portion of your estate to God’s kingdom. Explain the reasons.

- Periodically give up comfort for a span of time [e.g., air conditioning, television, eating out, customary vacations].
- The prayerful cultivation of simplicity is every Christian's business. And as it is increasingly experienced, its untold value is increasingly seen. May we apply its principles to our life, as we seek to travel a more excellent journey. These principles are reflected in an inspiring poem by William Ellery Channing:

### My Symphony

I will seek elegance rather than luxury  
refinement rather than fashion.

I will seek to be worthy more than respectable,  
wealthy and not rich.

I will study hard, think quietly,  
talk gently, act frankly.

I will listen to stars and birds,  
babies and sages, with an open heart.

I will bear all things cheerfully, do all things  
bravely, await occasions and hurry never.

In a word I will let the spiritual, unbidden  
and unconscious grow up through the common. <sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The poem is translated from a taped sermon of the Reverend Lamer Kincaid, who spoke at Longboat Key Chapel, Longboat, Key, Florida, in 1973. (Page 102-104)

### **40. Who will tell you the truth?**

Who will tell you the truth? An enemy who hates you bitterly, and a friend who loves you dearly. –Anonymous (Page 105)

### **41. Why surgeons wear masks**

Do you know why the man who operates on people wears a mask? So if he really messes up, the patient won't know who did it.—Small boy to playmate. (Page 105)

## **42. Carnal Self must be Protected**

When the “me” overtakes the “I” we’re in trouble. We must always be more than our performance. There is a kernel self that must be continuously cultivated and protected. And that self must be balanced against the role-playing part of our personality. Scores of movie and sports stars have allowed their social images to smother their private selves. As a result they sometimes rely on alcohol or drugs, or commit suicide. (Page 109)

## **43. Openness is Important for God’s Love**

This feeling of openness is much like taking a bath, pulling up the shades to let the sunshine in, or breathing country air. Also, it’s knowing what it really means to have a satisfying measure of Christian excellence. Such openness allows the love of God to flow freely from ourselves to others. The barriers are removed and the floodgates are opened. Pure love can now pour forth as God intended! (Page 110)

## **44. Rejection Must Be Done tactfully**

Every other fear has archfoe, the rejection slip. Realizing that he must be told when he is turned down, he still doesn’t relish hearing that he is incompetent. He wants to be told in a nice way. An aspiring author in China was sent a rejection note from his government:

We have read your manuscript with boundless delight. But if we were to publish your paper, it would be impossible for us to publish works of lower standard. And as it is unthinkable that, in the next three thousand years, we shall see its equal, we are regretfully compelled to return your divine composition. We beg you a thousand times to overlook our short sight and timidity.

What a contrast to the sign I recently spotted in a grocery store:

All shoplifters Will Be Merrily  
Beaten to a pulp!

Both of these are insincere. The messages are exaggerated. The former is an inflated evaluation. The latter relies on brutal frankness of the purpose of humor. As Christians, we must find a middle ground. We must be both candid and sensitive, honest and compassionate. This is no easy task. (Page112-113)

## **45. No one has labeled Jesus as Intentional Deceiver**

Our Lord never said anything he didn’t believe, profess anything he didn’t feel, nor lay claim to anything he didn’t possess!

Centuries have passed since his resurrection, and many uncomplimentary statements have been made about our Savior. He has been called a visionary, fanatic, dreamer. But amazing few have labeled Jesus as intentional deceiver. As Charles Edwards Jefferson declares, “There is something so pure and frank and noble about him that to doubt his sincerity would be like doubting the brightness of the sun.” (Page 115)

#### **46. Oaths—Binding or Nonbinding**

The religious of Jesus’ time categorized “oaths” as binding or nonbinding. An oath containing the name of God was thought to be obligatory throughout life. But if another name was used, a person could break the oath. As Jefferson states, “Jesus was disgusted by the reasoning of the bat-eyed pettifoggers.” In this Scripture he implied if you want to stress something, simply say it again. If people still don’t get the message, quietly repeat it. “The world should be a place where all the evidence needed to prove something true is that a man asserts it. Today’s courts of justice demand oaths because Satan has corrupted hearts and rendered ordinary speech unreliable. (Foot note Page 116)

#### **47. Christian should maintain a core of privacy**

As J. Kenneth Grider declared, every Christian should maintain a core of privacy. We need not feel compelled to reveal everything about ourselves. For example, it can be damaging to constantly disclose details about our preconversion life of sin. With the psalmist we can take comfort that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (103:12). There’s no need to dwell on our precleansed identity, nor to willfully shatter the confidence of others by continuous revelations about our sorted past.” (Page 118)

#### **48. Change your Conduct or Change your Name**

It was reported to Alexander the Great that one of his soldiers, who also happened to be names Alexander, needed to be soundly disciplined for bad behavior. The soldier was dispatched to the great conqueror’s presence. He was asked to confess and hastily did. After hearing the shameful admission, Alexander turned to his namesake and made one simple statement: “Soldier, either change your conduct or change your name!” The same admonition applies to those of us who bear the name of our Lord. May complete honesty characterize our lives. (Page 119)

#### **49. Happiness is Contagious**

You cannot sprinkle the perfume of happiness on someone else without spilling a few drops on yourself—Leo Charles Johnston, Sr. (Page 120)

## **50. Five to Change Light Bulb**

How many Californians are required to change a light bulb? Five. One to do the work, and four to relate with him in the experience—Anonymous. (Page 121)

## **51. All humans need Social Interaction With other Humans**

We were all born with a compelling need for belonging. Belonging we must—if we to survive.

During World War II, orphaned babies were placed in a large institution. The accommodations were pleasant: new furniture, brightly colored toys, delicious food. Nevertheless, the health of the children began to rapidly deteriorate. Although there were no signs of disease, they stopped eating and playing. They then grew weak and began dying.

United Nations doctors were flown in to investigate. Their prescription: For ten minutes each hour, all children were to be picked up, hugged, kissed, played with, talked to. The orders were obeyed and, within a short time, the strange epidemic disappeared. The little ones brightened. Their appetites returned. Their toys were once again played with. And when their ten minutes came, they enthusiastically reached out their little arms to be picked up by the approaching nurses.

The doctors identified their fatal lethargy as marasmus and described it as “a mysterious and gradual emaciation of the body which seems to strike when others don’t take time to show enough love.”

The same principle holds true for the elderly. Social disengagement leads to loneliness and eventual death. Our senior citizens feel the effects of such isolation perhaps more than any other group in our society. No doubt that is why senility is so prevalent and why postretirement life averages only four years. The cry of most older people was voiced to me by my father, shortly after his retirement: “Son, you can criticize me, accuse me, borrow from me, make fun of me all you want—but just don’t ever leave me alone.”

But we all have an irrepressible need to interact with others. This truth has been said so many ways. John Dunne states, “No man is an island unto himself.” Baruch Spinoza declares, “Man is a social animal.” Reuben Welch, in his book by that title, asserts, “We really do need each other.” Lloyd Ogilvie says God created us to be riverbeds rather than reservoirs. There must be a constant inflow and outflow of social contact with our lives.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Reverend Lloyd Ogilvie is pastor of the Hollywood (California) Presbyterian Church. The idea was taken from a sermon he preached on one of his national telecasts. (Page 124-125)

## **52. Social Individuals live longer and healthier**

And there is much to gain by sociable. Psychologist James J. Lynch researched the lives of seven thousand persons, age thirty through sixty-nine, for a period of nine years. His conclusion is that outgoing, sociable, individuals live longer and healthier lives than those who are shut off from others. The former are more resistant to heart and circulatory diseases, cancer, and strokes—and are even less inclined to suicide. (Page 126)

## **53. Welcome to an eternity of joy**

Giving spiritual birth to one of his creations, for whom his only Son died, transcends the joy of giving biological birth. Or it should. It is like saying to someone lost in sin: “Welcome to an eternity of joy. Meet the greatest people in the world, the *koinonia*—the fellowship of believers—who are filled with God’s own Spirit!”

Unfortunately, drawing sinners into Christian fellowship frequently ranks low on our list of spiritual priorities. No wonder nearly four hundred evangelical Christians are required, each year, to bring one new “spiritual baby” onto our fellowship! (Page 128)

## **54. In Humility Considering Others Better than Yourself**

The phrase *one another* is repeated no fewer than fifty-eight times in God’s Word. Our perspective of concern must give priority to those with whom we share in Christ’s body. Paul spells this out in his letter to the Philippian church: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering others better than yourself” (2:3). Becoming even more specific, the apostle instructs, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (v. 4). What is the basis of your advice, Paul? His answer, Because then “Your attitude [will] be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (v. 5). (Page 130)

## **55. The Church must constantly win new people to Christ**

Church-growth experts have stated that it takes an average of two years for new Christians to become fully incorporated/assimilated into a church. In doing so, he separates himself from the “old crowd” (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). Howard Snyder is quoted as saying that the church must constantly win new people to Christ. These persons still have linkage with the “world” and are able to relate to other people who are not Christians. To have a preponderance of second-, third-, and fourth generation Christians is to risk having broken contact with the unconverted.

(Foot note Page 132)

## **56. Stand or Fall**

Stand for something or you will fall for anything—Art Linkletter. (Page 137)

## **57. Behind & Before & Within Us**

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.—Watt Emerson (Page 137)

## **58. Peer Pressure in Kids**

But, Dad, I gotta be a nonconformist. How else can I be like the other kids?—Teen-ager to father (Page 137)

## **59. Does God change as we change?**

The key question is: Does God change as we change? Are his standards continuously adjusted to our own mindset and actions so that rightness and goodness are based on our unique situation? **Not at all.** (Page 138)

## **60. Excellence begins with High Standards**

Mercedes-Benz ran an advertisement which stated, “Excellence begins with how high you set your standards.” The same is true with Christian excellence. We must internalize and live according to God’s lofty standards—but with his faithful guidance and strength. Then our growth in him is assured. Our spiritual roots tap into his inexhaustible supply. (Page 138-139)

## **61. Worldly Success is Satanic**

Success, in the eyes of the world, means conforming to its pattern. This pattern Watchman Nee describes as the “mind behind the system,” in short, the satanic principle which governs our planet [see Ephesians 2:2] (Page 147)

## **62. John Wesley’s Mother’s Advice**

The mother of John Wesley sent a letter to her son, who a student at Oxford University. It contained a stated rule of thumb concerning what kind of convictions to have. Her words are wise: “Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin.”

May we avoid all such things that dull the keen edge of our Christian experience and testimony. For to so indulge is, of certainty, to be willingly disobedient to the One who loves us so.

(Page 148)

### **63. Heart of Iron**

Canon H.P. Liddon once said, I must have a “heart of iron to myself [i.e., demanding] a heart of flesh to my neighbor [i.e., accepting], and a heart of fire [i.e. commitment] to my God.”

(Page 149)

### **64. I Planted flowers, Abraham Lincoln**

Die when I may, I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow—Abraham Lincoln (Page 151)

### **65. Willing People**

The world is filled with willing people: Some willing to work, and the rest willing to let them—Robert Frost (Page 151)

### **66. The brevity of life**

Unfortunately, we often fail to comprehend the brevity of life. James describes man as “a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14b). But regardless of our illusions, earthly existence is finite. There is an end as well as beginning. The average man lives but seventy-four years. That is approximately 888 months, 3,848 weeks, 27,010 days, 648,240 hours, 38,894,400 minutes and 2,022,505,800 heartbeats. One writer focuses on life’s brief stages:

Tender teens,  
Teachable twenties,  
Tireless thirties,  
Fiery forties,  
Forceful fifties,  
Sacred sixties,  
Sinking seventies,  
Aching eighties,  
Shortening breath,  
Death,  
The sod,  
And God.

My college roommate, Mike, had a sign on his desk. I thought about it often, and even memorized the words:

But one life,  
t'will soon be past.  
Only what's done for Christ  
will last.  
(Page 154-155)

## **67. We are Stewards of God's Gifts**

John D. Rockefeller said at the dedication of the United Nations Building in New York city, "We are stewards of all God gives us—and that for a little while." (Page 158)

## **68. Desperately Needy People**

"Religion is too serious a business to be left to the clergy." Also: If football is twenty-two men on the field who desperately need rest, and 60,000 in the stands who desperately need exercise," church can be described as "a few desperately weary clergy—being cheered on by many spectators who desperately need the essential exercise of ministry." James L Garlow's *Partners Ministry*. (Page 159)

## **69. Worldly and Godly Success**

Success is derived from Christian excellence, received in gratitude, and reconsecrated to God is entirely commendable. Success outside this realm is not enviable because it is the only payoff its recipients will ever receive.

People are not our masters. Nor are the trinkets they wave before our eyes as they attempt to lure in their direction. Rather, we serve One who penetrates deeper than the external. He rewards the deepest recesses of our inner spirit with an indescribable joy. (Page 162)

## **70. Give Abundantly**

We must give until it hurts, then give some more—until it quits hurting." (Page 163)

## **71. A Soldier Gives his All, so Should we Give to God**

It was a snowy Sunday morning, the day before the soldier was to go to war. He attended the morning worship service at his church. The offering plate was passed. Later, while counting the money, the ushers noticed a crumpled note. Scratched out in pencil were

two simple words: One life. Rather than tossing in a few coins, the soldier had offered God all that he possessed.

We are asked to do the same. What does our divine master require of us? Everything. Recall the story of the servant left in charge of his landlord's household (Matthew 24:45-51). The steward neither had nor made any claim to ownership. His task, like ours, was to conscientiously apply the best of his abilities to the responsibilities he had agreed to assume—undergirded by his master's complete blessing and authority.

As God increases our responsibility and prosperity, we do more than say thanks and hoard. Our task is not barn-building and amassing a fortune. Rather, we must forever realize that we are given more in order to give more. Our tight fists must relax as we allow their contents to slip through our fingers and land on areas of severe need. These areas are close to the heart of God, (Page 163)

### **72. Three things that cannot come back**

There three things that cannot come back: the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity—William Barclay. (Page 167)

### **73. Always Move Forward**

Any direction, just so it be forward—Anonymous military General (Page 167)

### **74. The journey of a thousand miles**

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step—Chinese (Page 167)

### **75. Respond to our heartfelt convictions**

We must dare to act, to put ourselves on the line, to have enough courage to break the fetters of apathy and respond to our heartfelt convictions. (Page 168)

### **76. Act and assert ourselves in faith**

The inescapable fact is that we all must act. We must assert ourselves in faith. (Page 168)

### **77. Paralysis of Analysis**

For many of us, talk is easy and action is hard. And because of this, inactivity reigns. We're affected by what the late author and missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones, termed "the paralysis of analysis." (Page 171)

## **78. Student opportunities for action**

I have recently noticed some significant movement in academia to provide students with opportunities for action. For example, in-class experiments as well as out-of-class fieldwork illustrate abstract principles. My own university has instituted a tutorial program for juvenile offenders at Camp David Gonzales. The wards are taught math, English, and related courses on a one-to-one basis. Our students report that such action on their part yields increased self-confidence, more sensitivity to human need, greater understanding of the outside world, and expanded ability to conceptualize the connection between theory and reality.

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## **79. Avoiding action to avoid failure**

- To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.
- To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
- To reach out for another is to risk involvement.
- To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.
- To place your . . . dreams before the crowd is to risk their loss.
- To love is to risk not being loved in return.
- To live is to risk dying.
- To hope is to risk despair.
- To try is to risk failure. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Seen in *Humanican*, an informal newsletter for Youth Agency Administration studies at Pepperdine University, 28 January 1982, p. 2. (Page 172)

## **80. Can we romp-into Heaven?**

Is a Christian one having been found by Christ [the supreme battler of all satanic power] ‘wraps the draperies of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams’? Are we guilty of A.W. Tozer’s indictment that because Christ did all the dying we think we can romp-into heaven? Do we not feel the surge of struggle—the desire to enter the conflict—the true war?

Struggle? The only struggle some people have is fitting the body into the designer jeans commercially cloned from fashion houses. We wear the world’s brand on our hip pocket and wonder why we lack identity. Paul the struggler said, “I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17) The Lord’s signature was Paul’s identity, branded on his body. Elisabeth Elliot has rightly said that we will know who we are when we know whose we are. Designers don’t determine identity. God does. And if we agonize, it will become clear when the victory is won. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Edward Kuhlman, “God’s struggler in a age of Video Sainthood,” His December 1983, p. 10  
(Foot note Page 177)

### **81. In Christian life we must not retreat**

There are no plateaus in Christian life. We must move ahead in action in order to survive.<sup>9</sup> In effect, to not act is to retreat.

<sup>9</sup> The ancient Roman soldier typically wore breastplate, leather straps to his thigh, sandals, helmet, and shinboards of cork and wood. But there was no protection in back. He would not be tempted to turn around in retreat. As long as we march forward with deeds of loving action, we have spiritual protection.  
(Page 178-179)

### **82. Christians must Excel**

Doing must take the place of being. As excellent Christians, we must excel in both. Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38-42. (Page 179)

### **83. We must do continuously**

We must lovingly do continuously. To await the big opportunity before acting is to lose valuable, fleeting opportunities to act in small ways. (Page 179)

### **84. Loving Action Vs. Wheel-spinning Busy**

It is important that we distinguish between loving action and wheel-spinning busy work. The former increases, while the latter saps, spiritual energy. <sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Watts Smith, in “How Filling the Time with Good Activity Can Lead to Emptiness,” confronts wheel-spinning busyness in the life of the Christian. Not recognizing Christ’s lordship is one reason for living such an existence. In addition, she lists these problems: “(1) *Misinterpreting Scripture*. Not really understanding what Jesus meant when he said, ‘I must be about my Father’s business’, nor really knowing how to accomplish the work he wants us to do. (2) *Being insecure*. Thinking we must work hard and fast to get (and keep) the approval of God—and others. (3) *Believing we are indispensable*. ‘If I don’t do it nothing will get done’. (4) *Somehow feeling indispensable*. ‘Oh I couldn’t do anything that wrong’, or ‘I’m fine. Nothing will happen to me’. (5) *Being Guilt-ridden*. ‘I feel so guilty if I don’t accomplish all the things she/he wants me to do’. (6) *Pride*. ‘I’m important. Just look at all the things I accomplished’, or ‘I can do it better’. (7) *False sense of values*. Temporal, not according to God’s eternal value system’. (8) *Improper use of time*. ‘My time is really not my time. It belongs to

God, and I will be accountable to him for use and *misuse* of this valuable commodity'. (9) *Martyr complex*. 'Well, if I die, I'll die working for God'. (10) *Trying to be perfect*. Paul, in Philippians 3:12 said, 'Not that I have already obtained in all this, or have already been made perfect . . .' God has an ideal, certainly and wants us to work toward becoming that person he wants us to be. But God also wants us to be realistic. He knows we're human, after all, he created us. (11) *Not learning to say 'no'*. A definite weakness in many Christians. (12) *Selfish*. 'I want to do *what* I want to do, *when* I want to do it, *how* I want to do it, and no one is going to stop me'. (13) *Not learning to delegate*. Read Exodus 18. (14) *Becoming more concerned about quantity than quality*," Eternity, January 1981, p. 49. (Page 179)

## **85. God Alone must be our Guide in Action**

Action based on convictions, must become increasingly independent of the reaction of others. God alone must become our guide. <sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> William McCumber, in an editorial entitled "Leadership Paradoxes" has listed ten conclusions about people in general. He found the latter in a newspaper article about Howard Ferguson, a wrestling coach, who initially formulated the list. (1) People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway. (2) If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway. (3) If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. (4) The good you do today, will be forgotten tomorrow. Do it anyway. (5) Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway. (6) The biggest man with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest man with small ideas. Think big anyway. (7) People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway. (9) People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them. Help them anyway. (10) Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway."

McCumber adds, "The news article called these Howard Ferguson's Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership." They form . . . an interesting commentary upon our Lord's words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The value of an action lies, not in the response it will receive, but in the quality of the action itself. Doing what is right, because it is right and honors God, is abundantly worthwhile, whether or not it is understood, appreciated, or reciprocated." *Herald of Holiness*, 15 September 1982, p. 17. (Page 180)

## **86. A Christ-like spirit**

Slow to suspect—quick to trust;  
slow to condemn—quick to justify;  
slow to offend—quick to defend,  
slow to expose—quick to shield,

slow to belittle—quick to forbear;  
slow to provoke—quick to conciliate;  
slow to resent—quick to forgive.  
—Bill Draper.

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