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# 1

## *One Thing We Can Never Escape*

BIBLE READING: Romans 12:14-19

If it be possible . . . live peaceably (v. 18).

The timeworn saying is that two things we can never escape are death and taxes. I would like to submit that there is one more "inescapable": relationships, or how we get along with other people. You may spend most of your days with just two or three others; you may continually be part of a big group; or, much of your time may be spent alone.

Whichever category you fit will involve getting along. Ask any employer, any employee. Ask yourself, "What one factor more than any other influences the kind of day it will be?" The honest, thoughtful answer will take into account interpersonal relations.

It was my privilege some years ago, while attending English Keswick, to be invited to the Annual Overseas Guests' Tea. Almost all the guests were foreign missionaries, and the brief message was directed toward their interests. I've never forgotten this part of it: the speaker related that he had asked a number of prominent missionaries to share

with him their two greatest problems on their particular fields. "Missionary colleagues and the national Christians" was the consensus. "If it were not for these two problems, life would be simple."

Facetious? Perhaps.

Such a life would be robbed not only of meaning but also of challenge. "As much as lies in you, live peaceably," Paul exhorts us. Is that an "out" for not getting along with our associates? As followers of Christ, what "lies in us"? Surely the God-given potential for rightly relating to others.

How do one person's attitudes and actions toward another affect other people?

Think of a day when the company president comes in barking at everybody first thing. "Hm, must have had a fight with his wife," someone says knowingly.

We may have a problem with just one person, but we tend to spray the resultant hostility all over the place, affecting whoever happens to be nearby.

In the light of the importance of our effect on other people, wouldn't it be good to start the day with a prayer something like this?

Lord, You know what this day will bring and whose life I will touch. Help me to have the right attitudes; help me to want to be a help, and not to create problems.

We can't expect that everyone we meet will have prayed this prayer, or will even have a desire to live peaceably. But we're on top of the situation because (1) we're aware that there can be problems, and (2) we have the assurance that God will help us not to be the one to keep the problems going.

## 2

### *What Good Expectations Can Do for You*

BIBLE READING: Psalm 62:5-8

According to my earnest expectation (Philippians 1:20).

Marie's job was to circulate with the coffee and sweet rolls cart throughout the plant. It wasn't just the goodies that made her popular; she had a certain look about her; she was a ray of sunshine.

One day a customer remarked to her, "You always look as though you're just expecting something nice to happen."

"I *am*," Marie replied, cocking her head and smiling.

What a way to live! No wonder she influenced other people for good.

Living with good expectations helps to keep us in a happy frame of mind. It creates excitement for the next minute, the next hour, the next day. I've heard it said that when Mark Twain was asked the secret of his success in life, he answered, "I was born excited."

The Christian life is the most exciting life of all; we never know what pleasant surprise awaits us around the next

corner. And expecting good things is saying to God, "I know You have my welfare at heart, Lord." For when we commit our lives totally to the Lord, it's not some kind of cold resignation to the inevitable. Far from it. Such commitment puts us into partnership with the God of the universe, the Author of all creativity. He has a creative program for each of us who wants to get in on it.

Like Marie, I, too, live with happy expectations. Sometimes I can hardly wait to find out what God is going to do next in my life. I find this is such a good, emotionally healthy way to live.

I'm not knocking realism by lauding a spirit of good expectations. Not every experience is for our immediate good. "Nevertheless afterwards," the Bible promises, it will be for our good (Hebrews 12:11).

We all program ourselves according to certain expectations: positive or negative. These are key determiners of our attitudes throughout life.

The pessimist's expectations are gloomy; she perpetually expects the worst. Sadly, this can be as true of the Christian as of her non-Christian colleague. And yet, as believers we have reason to have the greatest of all expectations. David the psalmist knew all about this attitude of mind. He knew where to look when he wrote: "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Psalm 62:5). David's expectations had the right source for their fulfillment.

Like us, the psalmist knew that it takes both the dark clouds and the sunshine to balance our lives. But we can never know just when God is going to drop a thread of gold into the seeming drabness of our day. Such can be our expectation.

The Bible tells us, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29). Is it stretching a point to add, "According to your *expectations* be it unto you"?

### 3

## *The Part Your Job Plays*

BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:6-12

If there be any virtue, . . . think on these things (v. 8*b*).

Among current book titles I noticed one, *Your Job—Survival or Satisfaction*. My reaction was: Must it be either, or? Can't a job provide both survival and satisfaction?

Certainly, between the two, survival would have to take priority. As I pondered that title, I wondered what prevents any job from providing satisfaction. Let me pass on the ideas that came to me.

*Looking back* is an enemy of present satisfaction. Some women can never feel satisfied because they're dwelling on the past, the "good old days"—when gasoline was cheaper, bus fares lower, taxes less of a burden, and so forth. But such engrossment with other days can't change the present, and it does lead to unhappiness.

*Looking to the future* is likewise futile if you're depending on the future to give you satisfaction today. "When things get better," we say, as though we have any kind of a guarantee that tomorrow will outdo today in meeting our needs.

*A discontented spirit* militates against satisfaction. The apostle Paul knew this. From his own experience he wrote, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

I have *learned*, Paul admitted. Probably "on the job training." He grew to know the peace of a contented spirit, whatever the circumstances of his life.

*Looking to the job to do more than can be expected* can be still another cause of dissatisfaction. Sometimes we hear people talk about their nine-to-five activity as if that were all there is to life. But after all, that is only a third of the day; we still have a good slice left.

Perhaps the one-third can be survival and the two-thirds satisfaction.

If we look to the job as our *life*, then we will rise and fall emotionally as the work conditions and situations fluctuate. To avoid such a yo-yo existence, we would do well to have meaningful responsibilities and relationships apart from the job.

The great missionary to India, William Carey, had a handle on this problem. As a young man he said, "My business is serving the Lord; I mend shoes to meet expenses." Survival—*and* satisfaction.

## 4

### *When They Talk All the Time*

BIBLE READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Study to be quiet (v. 11).

You will never find it among the courses offered by any college. No credits will be yours for mastering it. But there is a God-mandated subject entitled, "Study to be quiet."

Are you thinking right now, *I know somebody who needs to take that course and practice it?* And in your mind's eye you see a little group of friends trying to have a discussion—but one of the group is monopolizing the conversation.

Some women lose out on fine opportunities because they're known for "talking all the time." They never do the other person the favor of listening, as though in their opinion what is being said is not worthwhile.

Have you ever thought that we *never learn while we're talking?*

Nothing wrong with talking, of course. God made us not only with the ability to communicate with words but also with the desire to do so. It's the *compulsive* talker we're thinking of, the one who "just has to talk."

Some women (and men, too) have this compulsion to

talk. Psychologists would probably explain this as compensating for not being allowed to talk in their early years. They may have been part of a big family and not given much chance to express themselves. There could be a number of reasons. But the average person doesn't stop and consider, Why does so-and-so always have to do the talking? Generally, we come to avoid the continual chatterer.

Another aspect of this subject is that when someone has "studied to be quiet," has deliberately thought of the pros and cons of overtalking, she tends to say something significant when she opens her mouth. I have a beautiful daughter-in-law. She can sit and be intensely interested in the conversation and not have to talk. (I'm trying to learn from her!) But let me say that when Lory speaks, people tend to heed. They know she has something to contribute.

By contrast, how common is this scene: A few people are together, and along comes someone who has a reputation for monopolizing the conversation. "Let's go," someone will say. "Here comes Pat; if we stay, she'll just talk our heads off."

Note, there's no expectation that Pat will have anything to say that could possibly interest them or have value. It could be that she does. But she has earned a name for talking just for the sake of hearing her own voice. This will be hard to change.

Sadly, this is just as true when the compulsive talker is a born-again Christian. People will tend to withdraw from her in self-defense—and she will miss her opportunity of sharing the Good News of the Gospel.

How good it is, then, for us to evaluate ourselves as to whether we need to apply this scriptural injunction, "Study to be quiet." As Christians, we have the added power to

do it. God never issues a directive without empowering us to follow it, if we put ourselves in His hands. The Holy Spirit will be our Teacher as we take this course.