

Stop Trying

by Bill Volkman

Probably every coach at one time or another has told his athletes during a match or contest, "Stop trying; you're trying too hard!" The coach knows that during competition it is too late to change anything. At that point, the athlete can only allow the trained skill and natural abilities within him to flow out of him. All who watched the 1976 Olympics from Montreal on television marveled at the "effortless," natural actions of Bruce Jenner, "the greatest athlete in the world," as he won the gold medal for the United States in the decathlon. Contrary to the jingle on the radio that says, "Keep on trying, Avis" (they try harder because they are number two), my advice to Christians who are under pressure is to stop trying, and just do what comes naturally from within.

Man's compulsive "trying" and self-effort seem to automatically carry over into his religious and "spiritual" experiences. Our tendency is to be imitators. When we see that our experience falls short of our position in Christ, we purpose to somehow try harder to act as we assume Jesus acted. Initially, our false sense of inadequacy causes us to look for new approaches, new methods, new principles and new gimmicks to enable us to act more "Christ-like."

The reason that Sheldon's *In His Steps* is the all-time best seller among Christian novels is its basic appeal to struggling Christians. In this book Rev. Henry Maxwell challenged his congregation to a new high in discipleship by the following appeal (which in turn has intrigued millions):

Our motto will be, "What would Jesus do?" Our aim will be to act just as He would if He was in our places, regardless of immediate results. In other words, we propose to follow Jesus steps as closely and as literally as we believe He taught His disciples to do. And those who volunteer to do this will pledge themselves for an entire year, beginning with today, so to act.

All of us who have been challenged to this approach of trying to act like Jesus have had the same bitter experience. Even if you can answer the question of "What would Jesus do?", to carry out the answer is another story. Acting like Jesus is impossible. Only Jesus can act like Jesus. Only our awareness that our life *is* His life will release us to freely accept ourselves and others exactly the way we are, as well as to "call into being those things which are not."

For years my service for God was basically a duty. In fact, its demands sometimes were a wearisome, impossible chore. The churches and organizations with which I ministered stressed both directly and indirectly the need to discipline myself and serve Jesus more faithfully. Even excellent books like *My Utmost For His Highest*, by Oswald Chambers, challenge us to "burn out for Jesus." None of these challenges will confuse us as long as we have an adequate awareness that He is our life; but for many the admonitions result in nothing more than guilt over the past and self-effort for the future. Yes, there is a yoke and a load; but regrets, self-effort, and trying are not necessary. "For my yoke is easy, and my load is light" (Matt. 11:30).

There might be an agony of soul on occasion, but this must be distinguished from struggle in our inner being. It is in this sense that Paul says, "for when I am weak (in my soul), then I am strong in my spirit" (2 Cor. 12:9). And again in 2 Corinthians 6:10 — "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things." When we transfer our belongings to the metaphysical, from the seen to the unseen, from third dimensional sight to fourth dimensional faith, we call into being that which does not exist. Life on this plane is fun, not fear; serenity, not struggle.

God's instructions to the temple priests included the following peculiar words: "*They shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat*" (Ezek. 44:18). Their clothing was to be made of linen, not wool. I am convinced that these words were primarily given to typify a relaxed attitude based on inner rest, rather than to legislate their outer wearing apparel while serving in the temple. Though men might be physically relegated to work by the sweat of their brow, inner sweat and self-effort disappear when we see the full implications of Christ's last words on the cross: "*It is finished.*"

How wonderful that "trying" can be replaced by spontaneous words of "*Let there be.*" As creation came into being by the simple words of "*Let there be,*" so all the actions of life are based on simple words of faith that are the result of divine illumination "Let *this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5). We do not have to "help" God in service, nor do we have to try to act like Jesus by being obedient to endless "ought to's." "*Decrees, such as 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch' ... have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom ... but they are of no value against fleshly indulgence*" (Col. 2:20-23). The obedience of doing must be replaced by an "*obedience of faith*" (Rom. 16:26). The outer obedience of works and law must give way to the obedience of the indwelt Spirit.

The admonition to "*be still and know that I am God*" contains a hidden truth in the words, "*know that I am God.*" Through the years when I heard that injunction, I always visualized a deep, resonant voice from a distant galaxy saying, in effect. "Be quiet; I am God, not you; if you listen carefully, maybe I'll help you." Perhaps He is really saying, "*Stop your efforts long enough to know that you are a unique expression of the one God.*" As I cease striving in the illusion of separated self, I can know that I and "I AM" are one.

But be clear that the physical or mental exertion is not the real problem; it is the independent self-engaging in illusory self-effort. In fact, as we come to see our union with the Treasure within us, self-giving effort and involvement will be more apparent than ever. Like Paul, we too will "*labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me*" (Col. 1:29). Then self-effort will become Self-effort. This type of striving is acceptable and natural, because it is based on His inner power. When life is approached from this perspective, His power will mightily work within us. This is our path to our doing greater works than Jesus did (John 14:12).

*I TRIED to be good and not to be bad;
I TRIED to be happy and not to be sad;;
I TRIED to be loving and not to withhold;
I TRIED to be willing His will to unfold.
I TRIED to do this and tried to do that;;
I TRIED and I TRIED, til I finally sat;
Spoke my loving Lord, with a smile so mild,
"Why not stop being such a TRYING child?"*

Anonymous

Since "self" cannot be improved, and we are told that "ought to" should be stricken from our vocabulary, what place is there in the Christian's life for personal responsibility? We are told not to try on one hand, but we are also told that when we finally find out who we are, victorious living will spontaneously be our experience. Do we as volitional beings have personal responsibility or don't we?

The Scriptures seem to teach both inadequacy and adequacy — incompetence and competence. First we read, "*For I know that nothing good dwells in me*" (Rom. 7:18); and then we read, "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13). The answer to this paradox, and to the question of personal responsibility, lies in the "*I, yet not*

I' truth of Galatians 2:20, as well as in the teaching of many other verses, for example, 2 Corinthians 3:6,7:

"Nor that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant ..."

Notice that the above verses clearly take us from our inadequacy, to His adequacy, to our adequacy. Notice the distinct parallel to the sequence in Galatians 2:20:

	<i>2 Cor. 3:6-7</i>	<i>Gal. 2:20</i>
<i>Independent, Separated "I"</i>	<i>"Not that we are adequate in ourselves"</i>	<i>(Because I need help) "I have been crucified with Christ"</i>
<i>Dependent, Positional "I"</i>	<i>"But our adequacy is from God"</i>	<i>"And it is no longer ! who live; but Christ lives in me"</i>
<i>Paradoxical, Spontaneous, Unified "I"</i>	<i>"Who also made us adequate"</i>	<i>"And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God"</i>

From the above sequences we can see that the attitude we have and the language we use radically changes depending on how we see ourselves. As long as we see ourselves as separate from Christ, we are painfully aware of our inadequacy. When we begin to see our inner union with Christ, we focus on His adequacy. But at this level, we still say, *"I can't, but He can."* Full freedom and willingness to assume personal responsibility finally comes when we are spontaneously taken by a fixed inner awareness of who we really are – one with Him who is Total Adequacy and Total Competence personified. We must move from saying –

"I can do it with God's help"
 to
"I can't do it, but Christ in me can"
 to
"I can do it."

A young friend of mine who was plagued with severe bouts of depression said to me, *"There is no way I can control my periods of depression. I know self-effort isn't the answer. But I don't think they will ever change unless God does it for me."*

At that point my friend was still in the Romans 7 vacillation stage, because he still had a measure of separated, dualistic outlook. Positional and experiential truth had still not merged for him. What he was saying was true for him at that point in his life, but he was improperly equating self-effort and personal responsibility.

But the day came when my friend was finally taken by the beginnings of a fixed inner consciousness of union. He came to the point where he could consciously say with God, *"I Am"*. I knew he had the answer when he told me that now he starts the day with a positive affirmation. He says something like this: *"I know that depression in my inner being is ridiculous. I Am going to live beyond any outer feelings of depression that come to me today. If I should be overtaken by those feelings, I Am going to pick myself up and go on."*

Because he was beginning to find out who he really was, he knew he was adequate and competent for all that life brought his way. Because he now knew something of an inner consciousness of total adequacy, he was prepared to assume adult spontaneous responsibility and freedom in Christ. Finally, he will be taken by that which he now consciously takes the verbalized words will become unnecessary, and he will just spontaneously "be." In like fashion we can all "*cease striving and know that I am God.*"