

## **Rivers Of Living Water**

*by Bill Volkman*

What is the meaning of life? What is the point of it all? What is true success? What has God really made man for? What finally brings that unshakeable contentment and fulfillment which is our legitimate inheritance as persons created in the image of God?

Though most of us are so engrossed in the busyness of everyday life that we rarely take time to consider such ultimate questions, events inevitably occur which jolt us off life's merry-go-round and face us into such things. It might be a divorce, a death, an operation, loss of work, bankruptcy, or a number of other traumatic experiences. In my case, four near-death experiences in the Sixties caused me to re-evaluate my whole outlook on life, as well as face the basic question of man's destiny.

Let's assume that you know who you are in Christ—that you properly see yourself as a wonderful, unique expression of the Spirit of God—and that you have moved, in your awareness, from being an inert *container* of Christ to a dynamic *person* living spontaneously in union with Christ. Now what? What are those "*rivers of living water*" which Jesus said would flow from the inner being of those who believed in Him?

I have no doubt that Jesus was referring to a spontaneous and continuous flood of creative Life flowing out of us to our local world. The "*living water*" (Christ) not only permanently quenches our own thirst, but is the basis of a fulfilling life of unselfish concern for others. Jesus put it this way:

*"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).*

Here in one sentence Jesus promises both complete personal fulfillment and the well-spring of loving service to others as a single gift. We not only realize our personal ambitions and potentialities, but experience the true contentment that comes when we creatively expend ourselves for the world.

For many years I believed that altruism (service for others) and egoism (self-interest) were in diametric opposition. My parents, my Sunday school teachers, and the preachers at church had all stressed that life as a Christian would consist of a never-ending series of hard choices between God and myself. Would I serve God and my neighbor, or would I selfishly serve myself? Would I choose a life of unselfish concern for the welfare of others, or would I seek only personal contentment and success?

The notion that service for others and personal fulfillment are mutually exclusive was probably the main reason I left my job as a tax attorney/C.P.A. at age twenty-nine to return to college for missionary training. I had finished eight years of college and had a good start in my professional career, but I was afraid that I wasn't "serving God" as best I could. So I decided to leave a job I loved so I would be free to enter "full-time Christian service." At great personal cost I would deny self and serve Jesus!

Of course, God has His way of turning our sometimes foolish and impetuous "mistakes" into part of His perfect way for us. This decision to "deny self"—by giving up my profession as a tax attorney—and serve Jesus, was just another step in God's plan to bring me to greater personal fulfillment and a truly abundant life.

In fact, *altruism and egoism are not mutually exclusive*. In Christ, a life of unselfish concern for the welfare of others and a life of self-fulfillment are one and the same. That which is

spontaneously done for others will always be personally fulfilling; and when we act in true self-interest, realizing our ultimate ambitions and potential, we will inevitably find ourselves serving others.

Don't confuse "egoism" with "egotism." *Egoism* is "the doctrine that self-interest is the proper goal of all human action." As unique persons created in the image of God, we were *meant* to like ourselves and have a healthy self-interest, or self-respect. *Egotism*, on the other hand, is defined as "self-conceit, selfishness, egocentrism, self-indulgence and self-centeredness." Though the two words are sometimes used interchangeably, in the jargon of the philosophy of ethics "egoism" is used in a positive sense, whereas "egotism" has a negative connotation. I would define egoism as "SELF-centeredness" (the healthy respect one has for himself when he realizes his union with Christ, who is The Self), and egotism as "self-centeredness" (with a small "s"—the Satanic attitude that man is on his own and he had better watch out for his personal interests, irrespective of how it affects others).

When we live with the inner wink of consciousness of our union with Christ, we will know that regardless of what others might call self-interest, we can see all as SELF-interest (CHRIST AS ME-interest). This is because we know that our true self is "Christ in us, as us." We know that we do not live as independent, separated selves, seeking after petty, selfish personal interests, but as unified SELVES who live spontaneously from within. Amazingly, the outworking of our inner personal desires will always end up being for the welfare of others.

Jesus was an egoist, but never an egotist. He never downgraded or forfeited His personal identity as the Son of God, or His destiny. Yet Jesus was also the ultimate altruist: He lived and died as a total intercessor for others. As the paradox of total egoism and total altruism was true in Jesus' life, so it is meant to be true in our lives.

We have been properly taught that "to worship and serve God is the chief aim of man." But unfortunately we have not been taught that we and our neighbors are all forms and expressions of the One, God. So we do not appreciate the fact that to love and serve ourselves—as well as our neighbors—is to love and serve God. There is no automatic priority or preference between serving the transcendent God, serving ourselves, and serving mankind. They are all the same.

As we find out who the real "I" is, altruism— unselfish concern for others—will be seen as the total, spontaneous outflow of our lives. Altruism will no longer be an onerous, contrived effort to serve God by serving our unlovely neighbors, but will be seen for what it really is: a natural flood of egoism (SELF-centeredness) that flows from us to others. Serving and pleasing our true selves will result in serving and pleasing others, and vice versa. Marriage and parenthood are rich illustrations of this truth.

Is the general aim of marriage to serve and please our spouse, or ourself? Do we engage in marital sex for personal gratification, or out of concern for the sensual desire of our partner? Did we have children to meet our paternal and maternal needs and instincts, or because of a desire to please our mate? Are we raising our children in a fashion that satisfies our personal wishes, or in the best interests of the children?

For most people, the answer to each of the foregoing questions would be, "Both." That which is most personally satisfying will inevitably be what is in the best interests of the other family members, of the marriage and of the family union. It is probably unwise to constantly analyze our motives with respect to our spouse and children, or anyone else. It's better to just trust ourselves because of who we are in Christ, and do the next thing that flows from us.

But here is the rub. We don't trust ourselves. Because of past failures and our separated outlook, we continue to see ourselves as inadequate—inadequate to stop sinning, inadequate to please God, inadequate to love the unlovely, inadequate to do what we think we should do, and inadequate to stop doing the things we hate. No wonder that all of us in our immaturity identify with Paul's frustrated cry in Romans Seven. It's only when we come to see who we are in the spirit, in our union with Christ, that we can revel in the "no condemnation" and total freedom of Romans Eight.

Fortunately, our inheritance in Christ goes even further than "*no condemnation*" and total freedom. We find that we are adequate to live creatively "as gods." Paul says it clearly in 2 Corinthians 3:5,6:

*". . . Not that we are adequate of 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. . . ."*

Once again, Paul seems to engage in double-talk. He says, in effect. "You aren't adequate—but you are adequate." But now we know what he means. Independent, separated Bill Volkman (even though born-again) will never be adequate to fulfill the letter of the Law; but when Bill Volkman knows who he is in his union with Christ, he is more than adequate to handle all that life has to offer. All of us can accomplish all that we are led to do, because the adequate One is within us, expressing His life as us.