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Theme: Our Spiritual Resources.

Proposition: Just as around and within our physical bodies are physical resources from which we draw physical strength for daily living, so around and within our spirits are spiritual resources, or capacities, from which we can draw spiritual strength.

Scripture: James 4:7-10.

Text: James 4:8a - "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." (KJV).

Date Written: August 19, 1958.

Sources:

Interpreters Bible, vol. on Scrip. passage.
A Faith for Tough Times, by Harry E. Fosdick.

Places and Dates Preached:

Sheridan, Wyo., Aug 24, 1958 (11 a.m.)
Montrose, Colo., June 7, 1964 (8:30 am)

Introduction:

1. The Scripture that we read follows a section in which the writer insists on the deadly evils of temptatio He points them out to warn his readers against them, to tell them to turn to God.

2. Our particular passage today, James 4:7-10, gives the writer's solution for successfully meeting and overcoming the temptations which we meet. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you," he writes.

3. It is true that we do things which we should not, that we yield to temptation, that we often are ashamed of our actions. At such times we can pray with sincerity as we have today in our prayer of confession (hymnal, page 510, 2nd prayer of confession), "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." The Episcopal Prayer Book, from which this prayer was extracted goes on to say, "and there is no health in us."

a. Warfield M. Firor, a surgeon associated with John Hopkins Hospital, commenting on these words of this prayer of confession, suggests that the words "there is no health in us," means that "there is no source of spontaneous control for our spiritual lives...We are disoriented; we have lost our bearing; our spiritual awareness is atrophied." He goes on to say that we must not be remorseful over this lack of direction, over our wrong doing, for "Remorse is the scrutiny of ones errors without hope." Instead, he points out, we need to repent, for, says Dr. Firor, "Repentance is the scrutiny of those same mistakes with hope." He goes on, "The genius of Christianity lies in the fact that it demonstrates renewal. We have the capacity of being restored, renewed. There is no other teaching in the world which is so full of the concept of renewal."

4. Our Scripture, our prayer of confession, Dr. Firor whom we have quoted, and a host of other witnesses, today and thro the centuries, all say the same thing, that we do err, but that there are resources and capacities of spiritual moral strength to be found when we turn to God.

5. Harry Emerson Fosdick, late minister of outstanding fame, former pastor of Riverside church, New York City, author of many helpful books, in 1952 gave three lectures at the Pacific School of Religion, which later were published as the book "A Faith for Tough Times." In this book Dr. Fosdick, too, lists some spiritual resources and capacities within us, available to us when we have erred and strayed, or when the temptation to do so is strong. His analogy is that within us and around us are resources for spiritual strength, just as within and around us are resources for physical strength. We want to examine here some of these resources, mentioned only briefly by Dr. Fosdick, so that we might be aware "wherein is our strength."

I. Man has a capacity to be inspired.

1. Dr. Fosdick illustrates this by pointing out that "as a ship in a lock is lifted, not by what the ship does but by what it receives - the inpouring of water from above - so our spirits can be raised by an influx from beyond ourselves, until upon a higher level they sail out again."

2. Think of a bar of pig iron, or a piece of lump steel made from it, or other solid, unshaped, heavy metal. It will not float, no matter how much water you pour around it. That same pig iron made into steel, the steel rolled out into sheets of steel, the sheet metal shaped, riveted and welded into the shape of a ship, the seams between the metal sealed, and you have a ship that can respond to the lifting action of the water.

3. God has molded our spirits so that we can be sensitive to influences which He exerts upon our lives.

4. He has made our bodies so that we naturally want the food, air, water, exercise, and other things which give us strength. He has made our spirits, our souls, our inner selves, so that we can make use of the things which nourish our inner lives. This capacity to be inspired is a source of spiritual strength, but we can refuse to make use of it.

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II. Man has a capacity for worship.

In our physical lives we usually look toward better

and better conditions of living. We seek to improve our condition. We look toward better things.

2. Inwardly, Dr. Fosdick says, "We are made not simply to look down but to look up, and healing hours of restoration come when, in receptive reverence and awe, we 'love the highest when we see it.' "

3. ~~We said in a sermon on worship that~~ worship is the soul seeking to atune itself to God. We usually find four steps in worship: adoration or praise of God, confession of our shortcomings to God, a sense of forgiveness and renewal, and dedication of ourselves to God. There is, indeed, something within us which makes us look toward God and make use of worship. Worship is one of our spiritual resources of spiritual strength, and we should use it regularly.

III. Man has a capacity for spiritual companionship.

1. Dr. Fosdick puts it this way: "Our souls are homes where we can welcome guests, unseen but real, in whose fellowship we find peace and power. Not rare mystics only, but every genuinely christian soul knows what the hymn means:

Thou Life within my life, than self more near,
Thou veiled Presence, infinitely clear,
From all illusive shows of sense I flee,
To find my center and my rest in Thee."

2. We know that to be lonely is unhealthy in a physical sense. We need friends and companionship for the best of physical health. When we feel unwanted and disliked we don't eat well, we toss and turn and worry at nite and don't sleep well. Companionship and friendship is a necessary resource to physical strength. We have the capacity for friendship, and we should use it.

3. Similarly, we do have a capacity for the companionship of the Holy Spirit, of the presence of God. Our inward selves need this experience.

IV. We have a capacity to experience transforming invasions of power that make life all over.

1. Dr. Fosdick puts it: "bodies are born but once; souls can be reborn. So one young man who came to me in

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moral disaster saying, 'I do not believe in God but, if you do, for God's sake pray for me, for I need it,' exclaimed after a victory which his unaided strength never could have won: 'If you ever find a man who does not believe in God, send him to me. I know.' "

2. John Wesley, Methodist founder, was an illustration of this resource or capacity which we have to experience a transforming invasion of power that makes life anew. Educated, a priest, a missionary, he felt weak and unhappy even after being active in his church's work for several years. He was in his own strength, and it was not enough. Then one night at a worship service he felt his heart strangely warmed, he felt God moving within and caring for him. His life was transformed. He became an effectiv preacher proclaiming this transforming power. Many of us even today are hearing and being changed by his message.

3. Food, exercise, companionship, happiness, all help in keeping the body healthy and developing it even more, but it can never be changed radically, whatever resources are available to it. The inward self has a resource available to it which can change it radically, effectively and permanently. Failure to accept this resource is to remain weak in spiritual things.

V. <u>Man has the capacity to be a channel of spiritual dynamic from beyond himself</u>.

1. Dr. Fosdick writes, "The great souls have done their work, feeling that it was being done not so much by them as through them. They were not cisterns, but artesian wells. Cisterns cannot stand some things - drougth, rainless months when the skies are brass -- but an artesian well, facing all that, is unexhausted still, amid parched fields and failing reservoirs, replenished from hidden depths."

2. As farmers, ranchers, millers, manufacturers, distributors, or retailers, we may be channels to others, as it were, of the resources and necessities of physical life. When drougth reduces the crops, inflation puts prices to where the average man can't buy, or inability to operate at a profit forces one out of business, one ceases to be a channel of the resources of physical strength to others.

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3. In the things of the spirit, circumstances can not prevent the channel from operating. In the worst trials of body and soul, inspired men have remained channels thro whom comfort, hope and promise flowed to their disheartened brethren.

Conclusion:

1. Temptations and evils do and will assail us in this life, as James well points out.

2. Nevertheless, there are capacities and resources of the soul with which we can meet these dark times. As Harry Emerson Fosdick said, there are the capacities to be inspired, to worship, for spiritual companionship, to experience transforming invasions of power that make life all over, and to be a channel of spiritual blessing to others.

3. We can conclude that just as around and within our physical bodies are resources from which we can draw physical strength for daily living, so around and within our spirits are spiritual resources, or capacities, from whic we can draw spiritual strength.

4. We would, we must, make use of these abilities, capacities, and resources within us, for they bring us near to God. That is their purpose. As James put it, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."