

The Larger Life

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the need for Christians to be enlarged in their faith, love, joy, experience, work, and hope, and to be delivered from old conceptions and experiences.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:11, Ephesians 3:16

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Fullness in Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the necessity of spiritual growth and enlargement in the Christian life, urging believers to move beyond stagnation and embrace a deeper relationship with Christ. He illustrates that true growth requires a larger vision, faith, love, joy, experience, work, and hope, all rooted in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Simpson encourages Christians to let go of past limitations and human standards, and to seek God's divine ideal for their lives. He highlights the importance of being filled with the Spirit to expand one's capacity for God's grace and purpose. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to live in the fullness of Christ, reflecting His glory and love in every aspect of life.

Transcript

"Be ye also enlarged." 2 Cor. vi: 11.

The law of growth is a fundamental principle of all nature and redemption. Whatever ceases to grow begins to die; stagnancy brings corruption; the corpse belongs to the worm; a self-contained pool becomes a malarious swamp. Vegetation springs from a seed, the seed grows into a tree, and the tree into a forest. Human life commences in infancy and develops to maturity. The word of God has all unfolded from a single promise. The great plan of redemption has been a ceaseless progression, and will be through the ages upon ages that are yet to come.

The experience of the soul is a growth. True, it must have a starting point. We cannot grow into Christianity we must be born from above and then grow. And so sanctification is progressive, and yet it has a definite beginning. Christ is completely formed within us, but He is the infant Christ, and grows up to the maturity of the perfect man in us just as He did in His earthly life.

It is here that the enlargement of our text meets us. It is only the truly consecrated Christian that grows. The other treads the ceaseless circle of the wilderness. But he has crossed the Jordan and begun the conquest of the land and the progressive experience of which it was the beautiful pattern and symbol. No book in the Bible has more progress in it than the book of Joshua, and yet from the very beginning it is the

life of one who has wholly died to self and sin and has taken Christ for full salvation and is walking in the heavenly places in Him.

And even the book of Joshua only begins its highest advance when it is almost ended. It is after the whole land is subdued, that the call comes, "How long are ye slack to go up and possess all the land? There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." And then it is that old Caleb, who has the weight of eighty-four years on his honored head, steps forth and claims the privilege of entering upon the boldest and hardest campaign of his life, the conquest of Hebron and the Anakim. It is to us then, who know the Lord Jesus in His fullness, that He is saying, "Be ye also enlarged."

I. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ENLARGED.

We need a larger vision. All great movements begin in great ideas. There is no progress without a new thought as its embryo. China has remained the same for three thousand years because China has not accepted a new idea. Her teacher is a man who lived long before Christ, and for nearly thirty centuries she has followed the ideas of Confucius and is just the same to-day as she was thirty centuries ago. Let China receive the American idea or the Christian idea, and she will be revolutionized at once.

So the first step in our advance must be a new conception of the truth as it is in Jesus and a larger view of His word and will for us. We do not need a new Bible, but we need new eyes to read our Bible and brighter light to shine upon its deep and pregnant pages. We need to see, not simply a system of exegesis or a system of Biblical exposition and criticism; a thorough knowledge of the letter and its wondrous framework of history; geography, antiquities and ancient languages; but a vivid, large and spiritual conception of what it means for us and what God's thought in it for each of us is. We want to take it as the message of heaven to the nineteenth century and the last decade, nay, the living voice of the Son of God to us this very hour, and to see in it the very idea which He Himself has for our life and work; to take in the promises as He understands them, the commandments as He intends them to be obeyed, and the hopes of the future as He unfolds them upon the nearer horizon of their approaching fulfillment. How little have we grasped the length and breadth and depth and height of this heavenly message! How little have we realized its authority and its personal directness to us! "Open thou my eyes, O Lord, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" "I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart." That ye may be filled with "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your heart being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." May the Lord grant it to each of us in the largest possible measure in accordance with His will!

We need a larger faith. What is the use of light if we do not use it? We need a faith that will personally appropriate all that we understand, and a faith so large that it will reach the fullness of God's great promises; so large that it will rise to the level of each emergency as it comes into our life. Do we not often feel that a promise has been brought to us with a light and power that we have been unable to claim and a need has arisen that we are persuaded God is able to meet but for which we are conscious our faith is not grasping the victory, at least according to the full measure of the exigency? This ought not so to be. If all things are possible to him that believeth we ought to have all things in His will for every moment of life's need. The Divine pattern of faith is the faith of God. Oh, let us be enlarged to this high measure!

We need a larger love. We need a love that will meet God's claim of perfect love, that we shall "love the Lord our God with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength." We need a love that will love

one another " even as He has loved us." We need a love that will "love our enemies and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us." We need a love that will love the lost as He loves them, overcoming our repugnance to every personal condition, and delighting to suffer or sacrifice for their salvation with the joy that counts it no sacrifice. We need a love that will take our brother's need and pain as if it were our own, and "remember those in bonds as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity as being also in the body." We need a love that "suffers long and is kind; that envieth not: that vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; that never faileth."

We need a larger joy. We need a joy that will not only rejoice in the gifts of God, but will rejoice in God Himself and find in Him our portion and our boundless and everlasting delight. We need a joy that will not only rejoice in the sunshine but in the hour of darkness and apparent desertion, when men misunderstand us, when circumstances are against us and when even God seems to have forgotten us. We need a joy that will not only rejoice in all things, but rejoice evermore. We need a joy that even when we do not feel the joy, will "count it all joy," and rejoice by faith. We need a joy so large, so deep, so divine that it will not feel its sacrifices, will not talk about its trials, but will "endure the cross, despising the shame," "for the joy set before us."

We need a larger experience. We do not mean by this any mere state of emotional feeling, but a larger range of Christian living, a bringing of Christ more into everything; an experience that will prove Him in all situations, amid secular business, exasperating circumstances, baffling perplexities, extreme vicissitudes; and, going all round the circle of human life, will be able to say, "I have learned the secret, in every state in which I am therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and how to abound; I know how to be full and to be hungry, to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." That is a large experience. That is a degree in the school of Christ that will outweigh all the D.D.'s of all the colleges.

We need a larger work. We do not mean by this that we need a larger sphere. That may not be. That certainly is not the case if we are not filling our present; but we need a better quality of work. We need to finish our unfinished work. We need to do the things that we have thought of doing, intended to do, talked about doing, and are abundantly able to do. We need to do the work that can be done in the intervals and interstices of life, the work that can be done on the way and on the wing, between times as well as in times of special service and appointment; the word that can be spoken as we casually meet people; the work that can be done by the wayside and on the crossroads of life, where souls meet that never meet again. Sometimes the ministry that can be performed at such a moment becomes the pivot for hundreds of souls and eternal ages to turn upon. We need a work that is larger in its upward direction, more wholly for God, more singly devoted to His glory, and more satisfied with His approval whether men are pleased or not. And we need a larger conception and realization of the work that He expects of us in the special line in which He has been developing our Christian life. Most of those who read these lines or hear these words have been called to know Christ in a measure unknown to the great mass of the people of God, and we have not yet realized what God expects of us in spreading these special truths and extending this blessed movement, of which Christ is the centre and substance, over all the land and over all the world. God is calling us at this time to a larger faith for this special work-the testimony of Jesus in all His fullness to all the world.

We need a larger hope. We need to realize more vividly, more personally, more definitely, what the coming of the Lord means, and means to us, until the future shall become alive with the actual expectation

and ever immanent prospect of His Kingdom and His reward. Oh, how little this great hope has been to the hearts and lives of most of us until within a few years! How utterly blind the majority of Christians are to it as an actual experience! How much inspiration is it fitted to afford to the heart that truly realizes it! May the Lord enlarge our hopes and intensify them until this becomes, next to the love of Jesus, the most inspiring, stimulating, quickening motive of our Christian life and work!

We need a larger baptism of the Holy Spirit, for this is the true summing up of all that we have said. It is one thing, not many things, that we need; and, filled with the Spirit in still larger measure, the fruit of the Spirit shall expand and increase in proportion. We need more room for His indwelling, more scope for His expanding, more channels for His outflow. We are not straitened in Him, we are straitened in ourselves. "He giveth not the Spirit by measure," but we receive Him in very confined and small capacities. He wants more room; He wants our entire being, and He wants so to fill it that we shall be expanded into larger possibilities for His inworking and His outflowing.

Beloved, "be ye enlarged." And not only in all these senses and directions, which no doubt have searched us and made us realize the limitations of our present lives, but we want to be enlarged in the quality of our life; we want not only more breadth and length, but we want depth and height, a more spiritual, a more mellow, a more mature fruition, and a more established, settled and immovable standing in and for Him.

II. CONSIDERATIONS AND DIRECTIONS WITH

A VIEW TO OUR ENLARGEMENT.

In order to our being enlarged we must be delivered from and lifted above our old conceptions, ideas and experiences. In a word, we must be delivered from our past. Old things must pass away before all things can be made new. We must die to our religious self as well as to our sinful self. It was when he was far on in the spiritual life that Paul uttered the sublime aspiration, "Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In the strata of our globe we find traces of the wreck of former conditions of organic life. There was a creation and then there was a disintegration, and on its ruins a new and higher development. So in the spiritual world, we come to the place where we are conscious that the old experience fails to satisfy. The old "Rephidims" are dry, and we must open some new rock of Horeb and receive supplies from a higher source than before. When you find your old nest ceasing to rest you, be willing to leave it, and like the eaglets, be hurled into space, that you may be taught to fly. Let the old things pass away. They are but the basis of something better. Let the old turnpike be broken up. The King's Highway is to be built above it, and God's great elevated railway carry us where formerly we trod with weary feet.

There is nothing that keeps us from advancement more than ruts and drifts, wheel-tracks into which our chariots roll and then move on in the narrow line with unchanging monotony, currents in life's stream on which we are borne in the old direction until the law of habit almost makes advance impossible. The true remedy for all this is to commence each day anew and to commence at nothing; taking Christ afresh to be the Alpha and Omega for a deeper, higher, diviner experience, waiting even for His Conception of thought, desire, prayer, and afraid lest our highest thought should be below His great plan of wisdom and love.

Are there not some of us, beloved, who have been trying a good while to get back an old experience? If we succeeded we should only be where we were, and if we are only going to get where we were, we have abandoned the law of progress and begun the downward retrogression. God has Himself withered by His

own consuming breath the flower and fragrance of your former joys, that He may lead you into something better. Let your old experience go, and take the living, everlasting Christ instead. Be willing to be enlarged according to His thought, and exceeding abundantly above all that you have yet been able to ask or think.

If we would be enlarged according to the thought of God, we must be delivered from all human standards, opinions and patterns, and accept nothing less than God's own divine ideal. Multitudes are kept from spiritual progress by cast-iron systems of doctrine which have settled forever the fact that holiness is impossible in the present life, and that "no mere man, since the fall, is able to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in word, thought and deed." And then a row of human characters is set before us to prove the impossibility of sanctification, and to show the satisfying and humbling influence of human imperfection. Multitudes have made up their minds in advance that they never can have the fullness of Jesus beyond certain narrow limits, and, of course, they cannot advance beyond their standards. Now we quite agree with the statement that no mere man can be holy or blameless, but the Lord Jesus is no mere man, and when He owns and keeps the heart it is a divine holiness and a divine keeping; and we do assert that what no mere man can do the living Christ can do and does do for those who abide in Him. Let us take the divine measure, whatever man may think or say.

Many also are ever looking to some human example, and, "measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." Either we shall find ourselves as good as somebody else and be content, or we shall be satisfied to be as some human ideal, and so shall stop short of the only perfect pattern. We shall never grow up to the measure of the Lord until we take the Lord's own word and character as our standard and ideal; until we take our stand upon the sure and immutable ground that He who commands holiness expects us to be holy, and that He who promises His own grace and all-sufficiency to enable us to meet his demands, will not excuse us if we fail. He has offered us Himself as the life and power of our obedience and holiness, and nothing less than His own perfect example should ever satisfy our holy ambition. Looking unto Him and pressing ever closer to His side and foot-prints, we shall be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, and shall thus go from strength to strength.

If we would be enlarged we must accept all that God sends us as His own divinely appointed means of developing and expanding our spiritual life. We are so content to abide on the old plane that God has often to compel us to rise to a higher level by bringing us face to face with situations which we cannot meet without greatly enlarged measures of His grace. To use a suggestive figure, He has to send the tidal wave to flood the lowlands where we dwell that we may be compelled to move to the hills beyond; or, to take a more scriptural and beautiful figure, like the mother bird, He has to break up our downy nest and to hurl us into empty space, where we must either learn to use an entirely new and higher method of support or sink into destruction. Thus He allowed the crisis of His terrible peril to close around Jacob on the night when he bowed at Peniel in supplication, in order to bring him to the place where he could take hold of God as he never would have done; and forth from that narrow pass of peril Jacob came enlarged in his faith and knowledge of God, and in the power of a new and victorious life. He had to suffer Israel to be shut in at the Red Sea that they might be compelled to take hold of God for their supernatural help, or perish. He had to compel David, by a long and painful discipline of years, to learn the almighty power and faithfulness of his God, and to grow up into the established principles of faith and godliness, which were indispensable for his subsequent and glorious career as the king of Israel. Nothing but the extremities in which Paul was constantly placed could ever have taught him, and taught the church through him, the full meaning of the great promise he so learned to claim, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And nothing but our trials and perils

would ever have led some of us to know Him as we do, to trust Him as we have, and to draw from Him the measures of grace which our very extremities made indispensable.

Often He calls us to a work far beyond our natural strength or endowments, but the emergency only throws us upon Him, and we always find Him equal to the need which His wisdom and providence have brought in our way. It is said that good Mrs. Booth, the great associate leader of the Salvation Army, and perhaps the most gifted Christian woman in England, was led into all her public work by being compelled unexpectedly to face a large congregation and fill an appointment of which she had not dreamed. Two courses were open-one to shrink and evade the unexpected issue, the other to throw herself upon God for larger resources of wisdom, utterance and power. She was astonished at the answer which her Father gave as she went forward in simple confidence, and from that hour she dwelt in the large place of divine sufficiency and worldwide usefulness, into which she had almost been forced.

Many of us can remember how in the beginning of our Christian work we ventured to accept positions of responsibility for which we felt we were inadequate, but, as we threw ourselves upon God and dared to go forward, His grace was sufficient. When a young minister of twenty-one, and just leaving my theological seminary, I had the choice of two fields of labor-one an extremely easy one, in a delightful town with a refined, affectionate and prosperous church, just large enough to be an ideal field for one who wished to spend a few years in quiet preparation for future usefulness; the other, a large, absorbing city church, with many hundred members, and overwhelming and heavy burdens, which were sure to demand the utmost possible care, labor and responsibility. All my friends, teachers and counsellors advised me to take the easier place. But an impulse, which I now believe to have been, at least indirectly, from God, even though there must have been some human ambition in it, led me to feel that if I took the easier place I should probably rise to meet it and no more, and if I took the harder I should not rest short of all its requirements. I found it even so. My early ministry was developed and the habit of venturing on difficult undertakings was largely established, by the grace of God, through the necessities of this difficult position.

Let us then, beloved, be willing to be enlarged, although it may involve many a sacrifice, many a peril, many a hazardous undertaking.

If we would be enlarged let us take the Holy Ghost Himself to enlarge us by filling us with His fullness. The highest enlargement is by the power of expansion. It is the incoming wave which enlarges the little pool as it fills it, and then rolls back to the sea to return with still larger fullness and make yet ampler room. Nothing so sweeps away the littleness of our conceptions of God, the pettiness of our faith, the narrowness of our love, the meanness of our self-consciousness, the insignificance of our work, as to be filled with His glorious presence, to look in His face, to feel the tides of His love, and to be thrilled with the touch of His own heart and its mighty thoughts and purposes for us and for the world for which He died. We need not say that the place to receive Him is the mercy seat. Waiting before Him in prayer, receiving Him in communion, drinking deeper and deeper of His life and love, the vessel is not only filled but expanded, until we know something of the prayer of the apostle in the third chapter of Ephesians, "that ye might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

If we would be enlarged to the full measure of God's purpose, let us endeavor to realize something of our own capacities for His filling. We little know the size of the human soul and spirit. Never, until He renews,

cleanses and enters the heart can we have any adequate conception of the possibilities of the being whom God made in His very image, and whom He now renews after the pattern of the Lord Jesus Himself. When we remember that God has made the human soul to be His temple and abode, and that He knows how to make the house that can hold His infinite fullness, we may be very sure that there are capacities in the human spirit which none of us have ever yet begun to realize. We know something of them as all our nature quickens into spring-tide life at the coming of the Holy Spirit, and as from time to time new baptisms awaken the dormant powers and susceptibilities that we did not know we possessed.

But all this is but the beginning of an infinite possibility. Oh, how He has sometimes taken a low, coarse, brutal nature, that for "years has seemed to possess no capacity except for crime and sensuality, and made it not only as pure but as bright as an angel's mind, and brought forth from that brain, that voice, that tongue, that taste, that imagination, when illuminated and vivified by the Holy Ghost, such glorious fruitions as the life work of a Harry Moorhouse, the eloquence of a Richard Weaver, the marvelous allegory of a John Bunyan, and the exquisite hymns and poems of a Newton.

Oh, let us give Him the right to make the best of us, and, with wonder filled, we shall some day behold the glorious temple which He has reared, and shall say, "Lord, what is man that thou hast set thine heart upon Him?"

If we would rise to the full measure of God's standard for us, let us realize the magnitude of God as well as of our own being, for it is with nothing less than Himself that He means to fill us. Let us take in the full dimensions of His resources of grace, their length, their breadth, their depth, their height; and then let us measure, if we can, the magnitude of God who is the living substance and personal source of all this grace, and we shall have some approximation at least to what the apostle means when He exclaims, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

And, finally, let us remember that we have eternal years in which to develop all this divine ideal. Oh, could we see ourselves as we shall some day be, could we behold this morning that glorious creature that the universe shall some day come to behold in the image of the Son of God, could we see our faces shining as the sun in the kingdom of our Father, and hear the songs of rapture that will yet burst from our lips in higher notes than angels ever sung, we would wonder at the littleness of our faith to-day and our fear to ask our Father for the merest fraction in advance of our great inheritance.

This is no picture of the imagination. This is no soaring dream of hope or fancy, for He has told us that we shall be like Him when He shall appear. Oh, could we take you up to heaven this morning and let you gaze a single moment on the face of Jesus, shining "as the sun shineth in his strength;" could we comprehend the infinite wisdom that this very moment is taking in the whole sweep of the universe in the grasp of His thought, listening to a thousand prayers at once, administering the government of innumerable worlds, and yet at leisure to listen to our faintest cry; could we measure His omnipotence as He holds in His hands the reins of universal power and dominion; could we stand the vision of His beauty and feel the thrill of His love in all its ecstatic power—we would have some conception of what we are ourselves yet to be: for "we shall know even as we are known;" we shall share the work of His omnipotence; we shall shine in all His beauty; we shall reflect His moral perfections; we shall sit with Him upon His throne; we shall be invested with His transcendent glory; and all we receive of Him to-day is a mere instalment in advance of that which is already our own by right of inheritance, and which shall be actually realized as fast as we can take it in.

We have eternity before us. Beloved, let us rise to the height of such a prospect even here; let us walk as those who dwell in heavenly places and share the resurrection and ascension life of their loving Head.

Rise with thy risen Lord,

Ascend with Christ above,

And in the heavenlies walk with Him

Whom seeing not, you love.

Look on your trials here

As He beholds them now,

Look on this world as it will seem

When glory crowns your brow.

Walk as a heavenly race,

Princes of royal blood;

Walk as the children of the Lord,

The sons and heirs of God.

Fear not to take your place

With Jesus on the throne,

And bid the powers of earth and hell

His sovereign sceptre own.

Your full redemption rights

With holy boldness claim,

And to its utmost fullness prove

The power of Jesus' name.

Your life is hidden now,

Your glory none can see,

But when He comes His bride will shine

All glorious as He.

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