

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE SOUTHPAW ARMY

Text: "Among All This People There Were Seven Hundred Chosen Men Left-handed." Judges, 20:16.

That was an imagination-stirring line in the passage we read from the Book of Judges. In case your imagination wasn't stirred, let me repeat it: "Among all this people were seven hundred chosen men left-handed."

In the midst of the blood-and-thunder of preparations for war between Israel and Benjamin, the narrator informs us of a battalion of left-handed soldiers. Why and whence all these southpaw hurlers? Were they ex-major league baseball pitchers who had come to grief against right-handed hitters? Had they gotten together so that they could all eat at the same table without bumping elbows? Why so many left-handers?

With my imagination aroused and my curiosity whetted, I consulted a Bible commentary. And this is what I found: the word here translated as "left-handed" means literally, "lame of the right-hand." These men were not natural portersiders. They were men who had learned to use their left hand when some accident or misfortune had incapacitated their right. Their example, therefore, is of more than passing interest to us.

Is there anyone who has not at some time and in some way felt handicapped? Maybe it's a shortage of money that's holding us back? Maybe our appearance is against us. Maybe we don't know the "right people." Maybe some guilty memories have become an albatross around our neck. Maybe we never had a chance to complete our education. Maybe our physical health is impaired. Maybe life has dealt us such a poor hand that it hardly seems worth the effort to stay in the game. This sermon is not for you if you have no handicaps in your own life; it is for those who would like to know more about overcoming handicaps and rising above difficult circumstances.

How do you make the most of a bad situation? Let me begin by suggesting that you realize that you are not alone. Whatever your handicap may be, there are others "in the same boat" with you. Much of the mental anguish of a handicap vanishes when one realizes he is not alone in his difficulty.

One is not alone because there are seven hundred--or more--with precisely the same problem. And most important of all, you are not alone because God is with you. This is not the voice of theological theory. This is the voice of experience.

"Misery loves company" and so does joy. Human beings are made for fellowship with one another, and with God. I beg of you, therefore, not to make of your handicap a barrier between yourself and others. Don't cut yourself off; don't turn inward. Rather, remember that you are not alone. Seek the acquaintance of those who have your problem; seek the friendship of those who do not destroy your self-respect; seek the fellowship of God's people and God's house of worship until you know in your own way that you are not alone.

How do you handle a handicap? In the second place, remember that everyone has greater resources and adaptability than he ordinarily uses. A right-handed man tends to be awkward with his left. But those soldiers of long ago so trained their customary awkwardness that they became renowned for their marksmanship.

Every one of us has a strategic reserve of physical and spiritual energy and adaptability which we rarely touch. We have altogether remarkable powers in reserve upon which we can call when the need arises. We often wonder how we could go through some experiences; but the



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fact is that most of us are able to surmount any troubles that come our way.

How do you handle a handicap? In the third place, dedicate it to the service of God. There is nothing he cannot or is unwilling to use in his Kingdom. In that far-off and primitive time from which the Book of Judges comes, men believed they served God by fighting. These 700 lefties had the devotion of those who fight for their homeland and they believed it was a holy dedication. As Paul found, God's power can be manifested even through weakness.

One of the reasons our handicaps loom so large is that our perspective is so short! At one place in the Rogue River Valley in Oregon there is a little knob called Roxy Ann which entirely blocks from view the much larger Mt. McLoughlin--simply because of the perspective in which it is seen. From our viewpoint, likewise, our handicaps are disproportionately large. By dedicating them to God we get a truer perspective on life; we see it from his angle, as it were, and there is revealed to us a glory with which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared!

Let me close with a familiar, yet ever-moving, scene from the life of General William

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Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. He had lost his eyesight and his son Bramwell had come to tell him the verdict of the doctors that he would never see again.

"You mean I am blind?" questioned the General. "I fear we must contemplate that," replied the son. "I shall never see your face again?"... "No, probably not in this world." The old man's hand moved to find and grasp his son's. "Bramwell," he said, "I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and the people without my eyes." Even so may we be given the grace to handle our own handicap!

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