

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Three

Vitality, Companionship, and the Group Life At Yale 100 Years Ago

Introduction

Welcome again to *Great Resolutions* where we are enjoying a new series to consider the lives of saints who have gone before us.

Today we would like to be impressed with the value of taking care of our personal vitality, of having spiritual companionship, and of grouping with others on the campus where the Lord has placed us. We will do this by focusing our thoughts on a little known college student who was on the campus of Yale University in Connecticut 100 years ago.

William Borden is not known for recovering any great truth or vision. But as our brother Lee has previously shared with us, we can learn a lot from our predecessors with regard to the individual or personal Christian life. William Borden is a pattern to us in this regard.

Personal Vitality

The Christian life and the church life all begin with personal vitality. Before we consider companionship, the group life, the gospel and the shepherding of others, we have to start from ourselves. We ourselves must be revived first. This is not a difficult process, for we find out when we draw near to the Lord each morning and enjoy His word and pray, we are satisfied, supplied and enabled to live and walk in the spirit.

This was the case with our brother William (Bill) Borden. He was born into a wealthy family in Chicago in 1887. He came to the Lord at a young age through the

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encouragement of his mother. Shortly after that he took a stand to be separated to the Lord and to consecrate himself to the Lord. Although he was fully involved in sports and many school activities as he grew up, he was not given to worldly amusements and indulgences. The Lord faithfully kept him in his younger years, and from his consecration he never drew back. He was taught that the real test of his Christian life would be in what he is and does in his daily life, not just how he was in Christian meetings.

In his formative years he began to build up some healthy habits of coming to the Lord in the morning, of reading the Bible, and of prayer. He realized the importance of being revived and renewed in the morning in order to live a life of daily victory (2 Cor. 4:16). To overcome in the midst of degradation, we also need to rise up every morning and be revived by the Lord (Lam. 3:22-23). Even if we can only give the Lord ten minutes in the morning before doing anything else, we will be revived. As Bill found out, there is a tremendous benefit for Christians to practice this. Coming to the Lord in the morning brings us a fresh supply and also leads us to have a fresh consecration.

Bill Borden also realized the importance of having a daily time in the word. By the time he got to Yale, he had two key verses as his motto for his college years. These were Psalms 119:9 and 11 which say, "With what should a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word . . . In my heart I have treasured up Your word that I might not sin against You." He would allow the Word to touch him as he read. If he saw that "in anything his life did not square with the Word of God, he ended it."

He was learning that the secret of power

was in Acts 5:32 – that the Holy Spirit was given to those that obey Him. He said that, “one must examine his life and put away all sin, not holding on to anything which the Spirit tells him he should let go of.” He felt that the lack of confession was the cause of much powerlessness in Christian service. As we also have learned, it is a healthy practice to be before the Lord to confess all our defects, shortcomings, wrongdoings, mistakes, transgressions, trespasses, outward sins and inward evils and to ask for the Lord’s forgiveness and cleansing with His precious blood (Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:9).

The Lord was able to touch Bill in many ways as he opened to Him in the light. In many practical matters the Lord began to gain the ground in him. The Lord was able to touch his attitude toward his wealth. Bill learned to give in secret, not letting the right hand know what the left hand was doing. He insisted that not even his initials would appear on a donor’s list. He realized that his money was not his own, but that he was just the steward. So he learned to be open to how the Master would direct him to use it. Although he liked cars, he would not buy one because he thought that for him it would be an unjustifiable luxury.

Bill was exercised to be before the Lord in all of his living. He did not want anything to come between Him and the Lord. Even in his consideration of whether or not to join a fraternity, he opened to the Lord. He felt, “He was a servant of Jesus Christ, and everything must be tested and bear the stamp of Christ’s approval before he would enter upon it.” He said, “In every man’s heart there is a throne and a cross. If Christ is on the throne, then the self is on the cross.” His motto became, “say no to self, and Yes to Jesus every time.”

He wanted to surrender all to the Lord in absolute consecration and learn to follow the Lord by denying himself and taking up his cross to follow Him (Matt. 16:24). He spoke of paying the price to give the Lord the supremacy, even in many so-called ‘little things.’

He also set aside time for personal prayer. Prayer was to him his most important work. Being thorough in his prayer life, he would record his prayers and their answers. Bill kept up his daily habits in the Word and prayer even during vacations and down times.

Of course today we have the advantage of knowing how to receive the Lord’s word by pray-reading it. As we read the words of the Bible, we can spontaneously turn them into prayer (Eph. 6:17-18). We have found that the Bible is the best prayer book.

Such a daily revival brings transformation with it (2 Cor. 3:18). When we take time to behold the Lord, we begin to reflect the glory of the Lord. This was the case with Bill, and probably the key reason that he bore such a testimony at Yale. He began to realize that college life was a time of testing for him and for others. According to Bill, all around him students were either “making or marring their future.”

Although Yale had such a great heritage, being a college founded for the training of ministers of the gospel, and having been visited by many remarkable spiritual revivals over the years, in the early 1900’s it was already coming into a state of spiritual decline. Bill felt that 75% of the young men in the US were bowing down to gods of wealth, lust and pleasure, and worshipping them alone. At one point he declared, “It is awful—the need for Christ here at Yale.” But Bill saw his time at Yale not as a time for criticizing others, but as an opportunity to give to others a little of what he had received of Christ and of the true teaching.



Companionship in the Lord

Even though Bill’s personal life in the Lord was becoming more and more vital, he was very encouraged in his first term on

campus at Yale to meet some other Christians. One of his new Christian friends became his true spiritual companion in the Lord. They began to come together in the mornings before breakfast for prayer and a brief reading in the Scripture. After a short time, a third joined them, and soon after a fourth. Their main object was to pray for their friends that they were seeking to bring to Christ.

There are several benefits of having companions. Most simply, it is with companions that we are strengthened to flee youthful lusts and are enabled to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Companionship helps us to run the Christian race with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22b).

It also helps to have close, intimate, and thorough fellowship with other seeking saints. To fellowship only with the Lord is inadequate. We must also be in fellowship with the saints. We all need to find companions with whom we can labor. We are taught in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 that two are better than one. If one should fall, the other will lift up his companion. Also, two together can keep each other warm. Sometimes we may become a little cool in our love for the Lord. Through prayer and fellowship with our companions, our hearts are often warmed. It is also true that two can withstand the enemy better than just one, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Bill began to have some taste of this with his new companions in the Lord.

Group Life

Bill's companionship developed into a small group. This little group which began with two freshmen, began to spread to the whole university. Many similar daily groups sprang up in every class. These groups became a source of real blessing. Many prayers were answered and many students were brought to Christ. It was to his small group that Bill opened up his burden to "learn to save people here before he could hope to go anywhere else." He told his group

that he was weak in this manner and had failed at times in bearing his Christian testimony, and requested their prayer.

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It was during his freshman year when he was 18, that his father unexpectedly took ill and passed away. After his father's death, Bill needed to bear more responsibility with his family and with the family financial matters. This of course, added to the pressures of his studies. But Bill found in his group companions strength and encouragement. They prayed for one another and for their friends. They also rejoiced together when one of their friends found salvation.

From the time of the Civil War to the visits of D.L. Moody, the spiritual life began to shift more into the hands of the students themselves. Christian work began to be done by students for students. The Lord opened a way for those in the groups to divide up the names of their classmates. They went over them one by one for prayer and fellowship regarding their condition and need. Sometimes a name of a difficult person would come up of whom no one wanted the responsibility. Bill often would say, "put him down for me." They began to realize that "only as they were filled with the Holy Spirit could they hope to win men from darkness to light and to faith in Christ."

By the end of his first year at Yale, over 150 students began to come together in groups like theirs. By his senior year the group life had spread to the whole campus. Approximately 1000 of the 1200 students met in groups for prayer, fellowship, and Bible study.

Conclusion

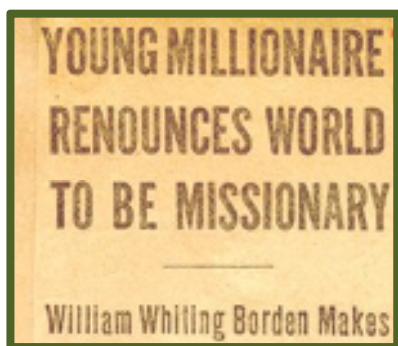
The students of that generation had a view not only for their classmates and people at home, but also for the millions of unevangelized throughout the world.

The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions was becoming strong among college students all around the country. It was founded in 1886 and sought to recruit college and university students in the United States for missionary service abroad. From a young age, Bill had this desire in his heart.

As his burden became clear, he offered himself to the China Inland Mission (CIM) to labor among the Mohammedans in Northwest China, a field in which there were hardly any Christian servants. His intention was to go to Egypt on his way to China in order to further his learning in the Arabic language, the Koran, and Mohammedanism in general.

Some of his friends thought he was “throwing himself away as a missionary,” but he had seen heathenism and was constrained by the love of Christ to go forth. To him this was a privilege of the highest order that comes, not to angels, but only to men in their fleeting life.

Although he would go abroad, he was still quite burdened for the campuses in the USA. He “felt the need was tremendous and the opportunity immense on the campuses in the USA. He said, “I should like nothing better than to get into the fight, right here in the American colleges, should the Lord close my way to the foreign field.”



Bill put his hand to the plough and did not look back. He set off on his journey with his first stop in Egypt. He entered right into his language learning and into the gospel service, but within weeks he came down with meningitis and died at the age of 26. Many around the world were shocked, but Bill had given his life wholly to follow the Lord and he lit the flame within many others. In his will he bequeathed practically the whole of

his inheritance, about one million dollars, for the preaching of Christ. Borden had previously recorded in his Bible and books that he had no reserve, no retreat, and no regrets in his consecration to the Lord.

The record of Bill’s life reminds us of Mary who poured out an alabaster flask of ointment of great value upon the Lord as recorded in Matthew 26. In verse 13, footnote 2, brother Lee says that, “*the story of the gospel is that the Lord loved us, and the story of Mary is that she loved the Lord. We must preach both — the Lord’s loving us and our loving the Lord. One is for our salvation, and the other is for our consecration.*”

Although some may consider that Bill’s life was wasted, the Lord surely values things differently. Footnote 1 of verse 8 says,

“Throughout the past twenty centuries thousands of precious lives, heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures have been “wasted” upon the Lord Jesus. To those who love Him in such a way He is altogether lovely and worthy of their offering. What they have poured upon Him is not a waste but a fragrant testimony of His sweetness.”

William Borden’s life and service was surely a fragrant testimony of the Lord’s sweetness. Thank the Lord for such a heritage.

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

References:

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