children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing could be
more Christian.
I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the
world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not
to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come
what may.
I still believe that love is the most durable power in the world. Over the centuries
men have sought to discover the highest good. This has been the chief quest of eth-

ci cal philosophy. This was one of the big questions of Greek philosophy. The
Epicureans and the Stoics sought to answer it; Plato and Aristotle sought to answer
it. What is the *summum bonum* of life? I think I have discovered the highest good. It
is love. This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, “God is love.”
He who loves is a participant in the being of God. He who hates does not know God.
From a sermon preached in Montgomery, Alabama, November 6, 1956

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2 *Summum bonum* is Latin for “highest good.”

3 1 John 4:8, 16

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“Overcoming an Inferiority Complex,” Sermon
Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[14 July 1957]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

This sermon was the first of a series concerning “Problems of Personality Integration”
that King preached during the summer of 1957. He uses the story of Jesus’s inter-
action with Zacchaeus, a diminutive tax-collector, as a means of encouraging his
listeners to accept themselves, to devote their lives to a greater purpose, and to develop
an abiding faith. “It’s so easy for us to feel that we don’t count, that we are not sig-
nificant, that we are less than,” King tells the congregation. “We stand every day
before a system which says that to us. But I say to you this morning, you should go
out with the assurance that you belong and that you count and that you are some-
body because God loves you.” In developing the sermon, King incorporates ideas
found in Harry Emerson Fosdick’s essay “The Principle of Self-Acceptance.” This
transcription is taken from an audio recording of the service.

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1 “Members Enjoying Sermon Series,” *Dexter Echo*, 7 August 1957

2 Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person*, pp. 52–78. King annotated his copy of this book and kept it in his
personal library. Benjamin Mays also dealt with this theme of African American inferiority in a similar
way (“Inferiority Among Negroes,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 May 1947)
This morning I want to discuss with you a very practical problem, and I want to try to deal with it in a practical manner. We're using as the subject "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex." There is hardly anyone here this morning who has not at some time experienced a deep feeling of inadequacy. How many of us have been almost overwhelmed by an appalling sense of inferiority? This is one of those experiences that seems to run the whole gamut of human life. Some years ago a survey was taken, a psychological survey on the hundreds of college students, and it was revealed that more than ninety percent of those students suffered from a nagging, frustrated feeling of inferiority.

Certainly many of the great men of history have been dogged with this feeling of inadequacy. Take, for example, Sir Walter Scott. Many of us feel that his *Ivanhoe* is one of the greatest tales ever told. But there were times in the early life of Sir Walter Scott that he was discouraged because he wanted to be a poet. And he used to look and read the works of Lord Byron, and he would become envious and felt greatly inadequate because he couldn't do what Byron was doing. And in the early years of his life, Sir Walter Scott was so overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy that he was ashamed of his first writings and had most of them published anonymously.

It is probably true that the inferiority complex is one of the most stagnating and strangulating and crushing conditions of the human personality. It distorts the personality and plunges it into the abyss of inner conflicts. And so one of the first things that individuals must do to integrate themselves and to be sure that their personalities are integrated is to seek to overcome a feeling of inferiority. This is one of the first and basic conditions of life.

Now there are several ways that we do this, and one of the most beautiful examples in all scripture of an individual who was plagued with a sense of inferiority and who later overcame that sense of inferiority because of his devotion and allegiance to Jesus Christ is found in the passage that I read this morning for our scripture lesson. You will remember that Zacchaeus was a man who felt a deep sense of inferiority because of his size. He was small, he was a very little man. And because of this he felt inferior. He felt that he did not belong. He felt that he was not accepted. And so he decided to get back at society, to pay society back by turning to some method of gaining attention, and this was to become a tax collector. He turned to Roman culture and became a tax collector. And after becoming a tax collector he made big money, and he tried to live a life foreign to his actual nature. You will remember also that in the midst of this condition he had an experience with Jesus. But he tried to get away from his sense of inferiority by paying society back and being something that he wasn’t.

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3 Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person*, p. 61. “One study of 275 college men and women revealed that over 90% of them suffered from gnawing, frustrated feelings of deficiency.” In his copy of Fosdick’s book, King bracketed this section and wrote “imp” in the margin. This study was cited in psychologist Gordon Allport’s book *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), p. 174. Allport’s book was included on George W. Davis’s bibliography for his course Religion and Development of Personality (Davis, “Selected bibliography, Religious Development of Personality,” 12 September–22 November 1950).

4 Sir Walter Scott, Scottish novelist and poet, published *Ivanhoe* in 1791.

5 George Gordon, Lord Byron, was a nineteenth-century English Romantic poet.

Now throughout life we see these conditions quite similar to that of Zacchaeus. Many people express it in different forms, and this sense of inferiority is caused by many different things. Some people feel a sense of inferiority because they are physically handicapped. And some people feel a sense of inferiority because of ill health. Other people feel a sense of inferiority because they lack social charm. Others feel a sense of inferiority because they are not attractive externally. And others feel a sense of inferiority because of love failures and because of moral failures. There are many things and manifold reasons why individuals fall down under the load of an inferiority complex. And one of the great challenges of life is to properly overcome a sense of inferiority.

Now people try many methods to overcome inferiority, like Zacchaeus they try different things which are not constructive. For instance, some people try to overcome their inferiority complex by turning to or fleeing to a world of fantasy and daydreaming and the world of illusion. And you will find a lot of people doing that. They attempt to get away from the realities of life by daydreaming or by turning to a world of illusion. And so the things that they cannot do in actual life they believe that they are doing it anyway through daydreaming. And so they find themselves the victims of endless and meaningless and crippling daydreams. That is one of the reasons that many people become drunkards. They start out trying to get away from an inferiority complex, and that's the way they try to drowned it out. And so in the midst of their inferiority complex, they turn to drunkenness, and they become what they are not when they are sober. They get drunk in order to escape the feeling of limitation, the feeling of handicap. And this is a way, a method, they feel, of getting away from the conditions of actual life.

Now we all know the dangers of this method of overcoming inferiority complex. It is dangerous in the sense that it leads to divisions within one's personality. Psychologists tell us that the more individuals attempt to escape the realities of life through daydreaming and drunkenness the thinner and thinner their personalities become until ultimately they split. And they have a big word, they call it the schizophrenic personality. This is the split personality. Individuals become so accustomed and absorbed in running away from the conditions of life, in trying to escape their actual selves, that their personalities actually become so thin that they split and the real self recedes into the background.

I remember very vividly, when I was in school in Boston, one of my very dear friends had a nervous breakdown. And he had to be taken away to a mental institution, and I visited him on several [occasions?] [recording interrupted] overcome an inferiority complex by using the method of the fox in Aesop's Fables. That is by calling all grapes sour that they can't reach. You find a lot of people who live life by

7 Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, p. 61 “The areas of their conscious inferiority were manifold—physical incompetence, ill health, unpleasant appearance, lack of social charm,failure in love, low-grade intellectual ability, moral failure, and guilt.”
8 Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, p. 63 “Others deal with this tension between the actual and the desired self by fantasy. Unable in the real world to secure their longed-for eminence, they retreat into the world of daydream.”
9 Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, p. 62 “Others, like the fox in Aesop’s fable, handle the problem of bitterly felt inferiority by calling sour all grapes they cannot reach.”
belittling other people. They get a sort of inner satisfaction and a sense of superiority by pulling everybody else down. That is how they live; that is how they overcome their sense of inferiority. They belittle everybody else, and their lives are based on a negative. They live a life of criticism and a life of negativism. They find something wrong with everybody else who lives in the universe. Now, when you see people like that, these are persons victimized with an inferiority complex, and they are trying to overcome that inferiority complex in the wrong way.

And so often you will find a young fellow who is weak and frail condemning all athletics. And so often you will find the individual who has no self-control calling everybody who has self-control a prude or something like that. And so often you will find a person who could not finish school or who did not have opportunity to get an education calling everybody with education a person who's trying to be a big shot or a person who's stuck up. So often you will find an unattractive young lady calling every beautiful young lady supercilious and selfish and stuck up. So often people find within other people belittling elements because they are trying to justify their sense of inadequacy and their inferior feelings. This is one of the ways that people use to overcome an inferiority complex. That, too, is a destructive way.

There's another way—I call this the "smoke-screen" method. People try to overcome a sense of inferiority by giving the impression that they are superior. And you see people, you think they have a superiority complex. It isn't that. They have basically an inferiority complex, and they try to give the world the impression that they are really superior. So they boast all the time. They talk about how much they have. They talk about how much money they have, how much education they have, how much they can do. They brag and boast, and they are cocky all of the time. Occasionally you will find a husband in the home who is dictatorial, and he has to convince his wife all the time that he's the boss, and he's going to run things and he knows more than she knows. Now he isn't superior, he's really inferior, and he is trying to overcome his inferiority through the impression that he is superior. These are the methods that people so often use in an attempt to overcome an inferiority complex. But as I said, these are the unhealthy methods.

Now let us turn for the few moments left to what I would call the healthy ways of overcoming a sense of inferiority, using as our basis the situation of Zacchaeus as he confronted Jesus. That passage says that Jesus went home with Zacchaeus, and I can imagine that Jesus said several things to him. As I know Jesus, I can about think of the things that he said to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, in his feeling of littleness, in his physique...

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10 Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person*, pp. 62–63. "The frail youth discounts athletics, the debauchee, really suffering from a sense of guilt, scoffs at the self-controlled as prudes, the failure at school or college, deeply humiliated, scorns intellectuals as 'high-brows,' the girl without charm exaggerates her liability, dresses cruelly, adopts rough manners, deliberately looks her worst, professing lofty disdain of charm as triviality. A major amount of cynicism springs from this source. Watch what people are cynical about, and one can often discover what they lack, and subconsciously, beneath their touchy condescension, deeply wish they had."

11 Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person*, p. 62. "Some deal with it by the smoke-screen method. Feeling miserably inferior, and not wanting others to know it, the shy become aggressive, the embarrassed effusive, and the timid bluster and brag. The boastful, cocky, pushing man may seem afflicted with an exaggerated sense of his superiority, whereas in fact he is covering under a masquerade of aggressiveness a wretched feeling of inadequacy."
tal littleness, in his lack of physical stature, developed this deep sense of inferi orty.
And Jesus went home with him that day, and I can imagine the first thing Jesus said
to Zacchaeus “ Zacchaeus, come down from that tree, and accept yourself as you
actually are. Don’t try to be anybody else except yourself.” And if you will do that,
Zacchaeus, you will be able to face every condition of life with a healthy attitude.”

Now it seems to me that that is the first way to overcome an inferiority complex —
the principle of self-acceptance. That’s a prayer that every individual should pray.
“Lord, help me to accept myself.” Every man should somehow say, “I, John Doe,
accept myself with all of my inherited abilities and handicaps. I accept those condi-
tions within my environment which cannot be altered or which I cannot control
And after accepting these I go back to myself and see what I can do with myself.”
And this is a healthy attitude of life. So many people are busy trying to be somebody
else, and that is what accounts for their frustration. There is within every man a bit
of latent creativity seeking to break forth, and it is often blocked because we are
busy trying to be somebody else. So this is the first way to overcome an inferiority
complex — accept yourself. That means accept your looks. It means accept your lim-
itations in every area. It means what it says “Accept your actual self.” And where the
conflict really comes is that individuals find a sort of impassable gulf between their
actual selves and their desired selves. And that is when an inferiority complex breaks
out in morbid proportions — when individuals come to see that there is such a
tremendous gap between their actual selves and their desired selves. And the thing
that every individual should pray to the Almighty God for is to give them that sense
of acceptance of the actual self with all limitations and with all the endowments
that come as the results of our being born in this world.

We should ask God to help us to accept ourselves and to use our tools no matter
how dull they are. I’ve used this example quite often. I remember when I was in col-
lege, I was taking a very difficult course, that many of you have taken. I’m sure, called
statistics, and I’ve never been a great mathematician. And we had the job, you
know, of finding the mead, mode, and medium, and standard deviation. And I
remember that I had a classmate who is now the bursar, I mean the registrar of
Morehouse College, and he had a tremendous faculty for taking up things in the
mathematical realm and doing them in just a few minutes. And I thought that I was
to do it just like he did it. He could do it in just a few minutes. And I was going to
do this thing like Leif Cain. I was gonna do this thing just like he did it. I knew I had
the capacity of Leif Cain, and he would turn it out. And I discovered that I would try
to do it in the same length of time, and I didn’t get it. And I finally had to accept the
fact, and it was kind of difficult at first, but I had to come to see that Leif Cain had
a better mind than I had. He had a better capacity for grasping this particular
thing. And so while he could do it in one hour, I had to spend three hours in doing
it. I had to just come down to the point of accepting myself and my dull tools and
doing it the best that I could, and this is the thing that every individual must do.

We must come to see that we can accept ourselves and live life in a healthy manner.

King received an incomplete in Statistics at Morehouse in the fall of 1947 and earned a C in Principles and Methods of Statistics in the spring of 1948.

Leif Cain graduated in 1948 from Morehouse College, where he later served as bursar and assistant treasurer.
A Ford trying to be a Cadillac is absurd. But if a Ford accepts itself, it can be just as durable as a Cadillac, and it can turn many curves that a Cadillac can’t even make, and park in many places that a Cadillac could never get in and can take off with a speed that a Cadillac can never take off with. And in life some people are Cadillacs, and other people are Fords. And when the Ford learns to accept itself as a Ford, it can do things that the Cadillac could never do. This is the thing that Jesus told Zacchaeus: “Zacchaeus, accept yourself and you will be able to overcome any sense of inferiority.”

Now along with that point, I’m sure Jesus added this: “That you must remember, Zacchaeus, that anything that you do for the upbuilding of humanity is significant no matter how small you think it is. Don’t consider your work insignificant. Consider it of cosmic significance.” All of the people of the world cannot do the so-called big things. Some of us will have to be content to do the so-called little things, but we must do the little things in a big way. We must do the ordinary things in an extraordinary manner. And we overcome our sense of inferiority by doing just this—by somehow accepting what we have to do and doing that thing well. No matter how small you consider it, you can dignify anything. I have a friend around on Hall Street, Urelee Gordon who shines shoes occasionally. And I just love to go there to get a shoeshine. He can do more with just shining shoes than most people can do with their Ph D’s. He can get more music out of a rag shining shoes than Louis Armstrong can get out of a trumpet. And I just love to see him shine shoes. He has dignified shoeshining. And that is what men and women must come to see—that anything can be dignified if the way that you do it and the enthusiasm that you put in it. As I like to say, if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper in life, sweep streets like Raphael painted pictures.15 Sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble. Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, “Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.” And then you come to see the meaning of Douglas Malloch’s words:

If you can’t be a pine on the top of the hill
Be a shrub in the valley—but be
The best shrub on the side of the hill,
Be a bush if you can’t be a tree

If you can’t be a highway, just be a trail,
If you can’t be the sun be a star,
It isn’t by size that you win or you fail—
Be the best of whatever you are!”

And when you do that you overcome this sense of inferiority. You become like the squirrel who stood before the mountain one day. He looked up and noticed its gigantic peaks and its curvaceous slopes. He stood back and said, “Talents differ; all

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14 Urelee Gordon was the proprietor of the Gordon Shoe Shine Parlor in Montgomery.
15 Raphaello Sanzio (1483–1520) was a prominent Italian Renaissance painter.
16 At an Atlanta NAACP rally on 1 January 1957, King attributed this illustration to Benjamin Mays (King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” in Papers 4:79).
17 King paraphrases Douglas Malloch’s poem “Be the Best of Whatever You Are” (1926).
is well and wisely put. If I cannot take a forest on my back neither can you crack a nut. When you see that, the squirrel gives us a philosophy to live by, that all of us can do something that somebody else can’t do. You take that and do it well. And when you do that all of the eternity strikes silent, and the angels shout for joy, saying that this is an individual who has discovered the way to live life.

I imagine Jesus said another thing to Nicodemus, I mean, to Zacchaeus. He probably said, “Zacchaeus, you must master, to put it in our modern psychological terms, substitutionary compensation. You must learn that even though you are inadequate at certain points, you can take those inadequate points and transform them into something adequate. You can compensate, to use another modern psychological phrase, you can sublimate and take these inadequacies and somehow transform them into something meaningful and something constructive.” So the young lady who is unattractive, who is homely, can develop a charm and an inner beauty and a personality that all of the world will have to respect. And haven’t you seen individuals who are not blessed with the beauty of human nature, who are not blessed with external beauty, but they developed a sort of soul beauty? And when you looked at them, you did not look at their external countenance, but you looked within, and you saw there a beauty that even the person with external beauty could never comprehend. This is the thing that is so significant and so vital substitutionary compensation. Here is a young man who’s shy and who’s all but diffident. Because of that maybe he feels that he has no place in life. He can’t get over his shyness. But maybe he can take that shyness and direct it into the channel of great scientific research and great artistic development and leave a lasting contribution to humanity that all men must be proud of. There are ways that even individuals with inadequacies can transform them into amazingly adequate points. And I’m sure Zacchaeus heard these words from the Master—“Zacchaeus you may be short, you may be little, your stature may be unequal to that of other men, but you have within you the possibilities of an equality that the world can always respect. You can substitute. You can compensate.”

There is another vital thing which I am sure Jesus said to Zacchaeus. He probably said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down out of the tree, and give yourself to some ideal and some purpose greater than yourself. And by absorbing yourself in some cause, in some principle, in some ideal greater than yourself, you overcome your sense of inferiority.” So many people feel inferior because they have their egos on their hands. The ego stands out as a sore thumb, oversensitive and easily hurt. The thing that individuals must do somehow is push the ego in the background by becoming absorbed in great causes and in great ideals and in great principles. I

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18 Fosdick, *Meaning of Prayer* (New York Association Press, 1949), p. 80. “As in Emerson’s parable of the mountain and the squirrel, he can be undismayed by the special excellence of another, and can say as the squirrel did to the mountain, ‘If I cannot carry forests on my back, Neither can you crack a nut.’” Fosdick referred to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poem “Fable” (1847).

19 Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person*, pp. 65–66. “Even so, however, a substitutionary compensation is almost always possible. The homely girl may develop the more wit and charm because she is homely.”


21 Fosdick wrote an essay titled “Getting Oneself Off One’s Hands” (*On Being a Real Person*, pp. 79–107).
Handwritten sermon outline. King may have used to preach "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex" at Dexter (14 July 1957),

There is really a present, the now.

A deep feel of inferiority, one settling of one's soul when the moment of truth comes. The moment of truth is the moment when I realize that I am absolutely helpless. I find myself nesteled among other people and feel that I need their approval and at the same time feel that they need mine. As I begin to understand it, a great wave of helplessness, a great wave of loneliness comes over me until I feel that I am alone in the world...
She was advised of his first writings and published some of them anonymously.

The inferiority complex was one of the must stagnating and strangling psychological conditions. It distorts the personality and changes one into the abyss of inner conflict. Seen in a real sense, true personality integration is determined by the way she handled his sense of inadequacy.

The situations that give rise to the sense of inferiority are usually physical handicaps, ill health, unpleasant appearance, lack of social charm, failure in love, lack of high intellectual ability.

We turn to the New Testament for the first example of a man who first
considered his sense of inferiority and other matters he was to overcome. But when he fell one day under the influence of Christ, Zechariah became again a man of faith. He felt a sense of inferiority because of his age; he was an old, old man.

1. Some People go further: the Zechariases. They turn to many unhealthy escapes to solve the problem of inferiority.

2. Some of the escape persons handle the problem:
   A. Some deal with it by fleeing into a world of fantasy and illusion. They dream in a daydreaming world what they cannot do in actual life.
   B. Daydreaming can be a useful faculty; it can furnish human escape from boredom and anxiety, but when it changes in escape from the realities of life it can harmful...
(2) Drinking—The reason why many people become habitual drinkers is to overcome their feeling of inferiority. Through drink they become what they cannot be sober awake. By alcohol a man seeks to lift himself from his actual limitation into the comforting illusion of greatness and grandeur.

(3) The danger of these methods is that they bring temporary peace but they lead to great pain. Thus we must face this.

B. Others, like the Fox in Aesop's fable, handle the problem by talking about all grapes they cannot reach. They relitde everything that seems to be beyond their reach, that is no concern to the
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think that is what Jesus meant when he said, "He who seeks to find his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it." In other words, he who seeks to find his ego will lose his ego, but he who loses his ego in some great cause greater than his ego shall find his ego. This is the thing that challenges us.

We look back across the years, and we see a great man like Abraham Lincoln. We see the great contribution that he made to humanity and to history. You must never forget that up until he was forty-five years old, Abraham Lincoln was one of the most discouraged men that ever lived. He felt a sense of insignificance. He ran for the state legislature and was defeated there. He went into business and failed there and spent seventeen years of his life paying off the debt of a worthless partner. He met the girl that he so passionately loved and wanted to marry, and she died. In 1846 he ran for Congress and was elected, and two years later he was defeated. He ran for the United States Senate; was defeated there. In 1856 he ran for the vice presidency of the United States and was defeated there. And two years later Douglas defeated him again. Lincoln was about to feel that he was insignificant, that he did not count, that he did not belong. Then Lincoln, one day, became interested in the slavery issue, and he gave his life to this cause. He became embedded in this cause. And because of his being embedded in this cause, in giving himself to this cause and losing himself into this cause, he became a great man.

When H. G. Wells was called upon to list the seven great men of history, he'd look back and picked Jesus of Nazareth. He'd look back to Greece and pick Socrates. He had looked over to India and picked Mahatma Gandhi, but he said, "Before I stop, I must turn my eyes to America and pick Abraham Lincoln." This man became great because he absorbed himself in a cause greater than himself. And so many people have a sense of inferiority today because they aren't doing anything. They aren't doing anything but going to work and coming home and sitting down, thinking of themselves, and their life is lived in a mirror room where everywhere they look they see themselves. And so they live a life of inferiority which leads to morbid and tragic ends. This is so important. This is so vital, to lose yourself in a cause greater than yourself and give yourself to it.

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22 Cf. Matthew 10:39, 16:25

23 Fosdick, "A Man Is What He Proves to Be in an Emergency," in On Being Fit to Live With, pp. 155–156. "Once there was a man in Springfield, Illinois, who ran for the legislature and was defeated. Then he entered business, and failed, and spent seventeen years paying the debts of a worthless partner. He fell passionately in love with the girl of his choice who loved him in return, and then she died. He was elected to Congress in 1846 and served one term but was defeated when he ran for re-election. Next, he tried to get an appointment to the United States Land Office and failed. Then, becoming a candidate for the United States Senate, he was defeated. In 1856 as a candidate for the vice presidency he was beaten, and two years later Douglas defeated him again. And when at last he became President, the first thing that happened was a great war that he would have given his life to prevent. What a lifetime of testing! But in Washington there is a Memorial to him that some of us can hardly enter without shedding tears."

There is a final point. I'm sure Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "If you really want to overcome this sense of inferiority, develop an abiding religious faith." Because there is something about religion that gives you a sense of belonging. I'm sure you've read of the great psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Jung said some years ago, "Of all of the hundreds and thousands of patients that have come to me for treatment and counsel over the past few years, I think I can truly say that all of them past the middle of life had conditions which could be cured by the proper religious faith." That isn't a preacher talking. That's a psychoanalyst talking. Irreligion somehow leaves us standing in a blind universe. It says to us somehow that human life is nothing but a cosmic accident on a minor planet, a sort of haphazard by-product of blind forces. Says to us somehow that man is nothing but a tiny vagary of whirling electrons, a wisp of smoke from a limitless smoldering. But then religion comes over and says, "Oh no," that this universe has meaning and that every individual in this universe counts and every individual in this universe has significance because there is a God who guides the destiny of life. There is a God who stands at the center of the universe, and he who discovers this principle begins to live.

And I would say to you this morning that you have an opportunity to feel that you're somebody if you develop early the proper religious faith. In our society, in which it's so easy for us to feel that we don't count, in which it's so easy to feel that we are sort of depersonalized cogs in a vast industrial machine, this has vital significance. And this has a lot of significance for the race problem and for every Negro who stands in America. It's so easy for us to feel inferior because we have lived so long amid the tragic midnight of injustice and oppression. This is one thing that the great social psychologists have been saying across the past few years—that segregation generates a feeling of inferiority, that it gives the individuals under the system an inferiority complex. We can hear it ringing from Dr. Gordon Allport of Harvard and Dr. Gardner Murphy of Columbia, from Dr. Kenneth Clark of New York University, that these inferior feelings develop because of the system of segregation. And it's so easy for us to feel that we don't count, that we are not significant, that we are less than. We stand every day before a system which says that to us. But I say to you this morning, you should go out with the assurance that you belong and that you count and that you are somebody because God loves you. And that becomes a hope. That is the vital point. When men can see the true meaning of the great religion of the ages, they can find a new sense of dignity and a new sense of belonging. And they can walk through life with a self-respect, with a sense of dignity that nothing can take from them.

25 King paraphrases C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 264, see also Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, p. 74.
26 C. S. Lewis, Answers to Questions on Christianity, p. 10.
27 Harvard professor Gordon Willard Allport wrote The Nature of Prejudice (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1954). Columbia University psychology professor Edgar Gardner Murphy wrote Problems of the Present South, which considered the emotional, intellectual, and social barriers that keep African Americans and whites from seeing themselves and each other as they are (New York: Macmillan, 1904). Kenneth Bancroft Clark was a social psychologist who taught at the City College of New York and whose 1950 study on the effects of racial segregation on children was used by the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in its case, Brown v. Board of Education (1954). In an 1989 oral history, Clark reminisced about his "wonderful debates" with King on the
That was what happened around slavery. People lived amid the dark days of slavery. So many things stood there to discourage them, but the old preacher would come up with his broken language. He would look out to them and said, "Friends, you ain't no nigger. You ain't no slave, but you God's chillun." And that gave them something to make another week. They knew in many instances that they had to go out into the field and work all day from camp to camp. They knew that they would be beaten and trampled over and kicked about. Sometimes the women knew that they had to give up their bodies to satisfy the biological urges of the old, mean, white boss. They knew that as soon as their children were born they would be snatched from their hands like a hungry dog snatches a bone from a human hand. They lived amid the darkness and the anger and the anguish of slavery, and sometimes I'm sure they felt like giving up. Then they got something within their soul, their religion began to ring out to them. They did not know anything about the lasting traditions of intellectual systems. They had probably never heard of Plato or Aristotle. They could have never understood Einstein's theory of relativity. They knew nothing about a compound or complex sentence. They didn't know the difference between "you does" and "you don't," but they knew God. They knew that the God that they had heard about in the New Testament was not a God that would subject some of his children and exalt the others. And so although they knew that some days they had to go out into the field in their bare feet, that didn't stop them. And they could sing in their broken language:

I got shoes, you got shoes,
All of God's chillun got shoes
When I get to heaven gonna put on my shoes
And just walk all over God's heaven

I got a robe, you got a robe,
All of God's chillun got a robe
When I get to heaven gonna put on my robe
And just gonna shout all over God's heaven.

They had something that kept them going. And I say to you this morning go out of this church with a new faith in yourself, with a new self-confidence, with a new sense of dignity, knowing that there is a God in this universe who loves all of his children. And although [recording interrupted]

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philosophy of nonviolence and "about telling the masses of blacks that they should 'love the oppressor' " He reflected further, saying, "No matter how you define it, no matter how many of the Greek words you use to differentiate the various kinds of love, let's face the fact that oppressed human beings do not react to oppression by philosophy" (Clark, "Reminiscences of Kenneth Bancroft Clark," interview by Ed Edwin, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, 1989, pp 282–283)

28 Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, p 50 "When I was a youngster, this was drilled into me by my grandmother. The idea was given to her by a certain slave minister who, on occasion, held secret religious meetings with his fellow slaves. How everything in me quivered with the pulsing tremor of raw energy when, in her recital, she would come to the triumphant climax of the minister 'You—you are not niggers. You—you are not slaves. You are God's children.'"

29 King quotes the spiritual "All God's Chillun Got Wings."