"The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,"  
Sermon Delivered at Friendship Baptist Church  

28 February 1960  
Pasadena, Calif

Shortly after leaving Dexter to join his father as co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King delivered the following sermon at Martin T. Robinson’s Friendship Baptist Church as part of a Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) fund-raising trip to southern California. While introducing King, Robinson lauded him for “making a signal contribution to our American way of life, the equality of man, and the dignity of the individual,” and assured King, “We rejoice when you rejoice, and when you are in trouble we are also in trouble.”

Expanding on a version of this sermon that he delivered in 1954 as a candidate for Dexter’s pastorate, King reflects on many of his experiences, including the successful bus boycott and his 1959 journey to the Holy Land and India. He also lambasts white racism. “Many of our white brothers are concerned only about the length of life, their preferred economic positions, their political power, their so-called way of life. If they would ever rise up and add breadth to length, the other-regarding dimension to the self-regarding dimension, we would be able to solve all of the problems in our nation today.” The following text is taken from an audio recording of the service.

[Choir singing]

My good friend Reverend Robinson, distinguished guests, members and friends of the Friendship Baptist Church of Pasadena, I am certainly delighted to have the privilege and pleasure of being with you today and of being a part of this worship experience. As your pastor said, I have been invited to Friendship on a number of occasions, and each time some previous long-standing commitment stood in the way.

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1. Robinson (1914–2001) was the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church from 1954 until 1971. In a 6 February 1960 letter to Los Angeles Baptist Ministers Conference president P. J. Ellis, King accepted an invitation to speak at an afternoon rally and benefit for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) on February 28 at Timothy M. Chambers’s Zion Hill Baptist Church in Los Angeles. He also indicated that he would fill the pulpit at Friendship Baptist Church that morning. Later that day King preached “Going Forward by Going Backward” at G. H. B. Charles’s Mt. Sinai Baptist Church (“Huge Crowds Attend M. L. King Rallies,” Los Angeles Sentinel, 3 March 1960).

2. King’s five-day speaking tour was arranged by Maurice Dawkins, chair of the California Ministers Christian Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and also included stops in Bakersfield and San Diego (Dawkins to King, 17 February 1960, Murlene Whitley to King, 9 March 1960, Wayne A. Neal to King, 1 March 1960). On 27 February King attended a dinner organized by Morehouse alumni. He reportedly discussed the need for nonviolence in order to win white support. He explained that “violence for independence is all right” but “non-violence is much more practical in trying to obtain integration.” (Brad Pye, Jr., “Martin Luther King Hits L.A.’s Geranium Leaders,” Los Angeles Sentinel, 3 March 1960, “Morehouse Alumni Host M. L. King,” Los Angeles Sentinel, 3 March 1960). Friendship Baptist contributed $1,000 to SCLC. King’s densely scheduled West Coast visit, which attracted overflow crowds at every stop, raised over $5,000 for the organization.

way. But I am very happy that at long last I found it possible to come to this community and to the church of my good friend Marvin Robinson and my friends of Pasadena (Née, Amen).

I bring you greetings this morning from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization consisting leaders from all across the Southland (Congregation) (Oh yes), leaders who are working in a determined, courageous yet Christian manner (Praise the Lord) to achieve full equality for the Negro people of the South. (Praise the Lord) Naturally, in seeking to do this, we face tremendous odds and tremendous difficulties, but we go on with the faith that what we are doing is right not only for the Negro people of the nation but for the soul of America (Praise the Lord, Amen). For I am convinced that our struggle is not the struggle merely for the freedom of seventeen or eighteen million black men and black women, but it is a struggle to save the soul of the United States (Praise the Lord, Amen). Therefore, what we are doing, it seems to me, is something that the government of this nation should welcome (Amen, Amen) because America cannot remain a first-class nation so long as she has second-class citizens. (Amen, Amen)

I solicit your support for our work in the South, your moral support and your financial support. One of the things that we are trying to do through our Conference, along with other things, is to increase the number of Negro registered voters in the South, feeling that if this is done many of our problems can be solved on the local level. There are potentially five million Negro voters in the South, and out of that number there are only one million three hundred thousand. And so as you can see we have a long, long way to go (Amen). But we're going to keep working with grim and bold determination until our people and your brothers and sisters have the ballot (Amen).

Now, naturally, it takes a lot of time and energy and money to do this because it means getting people into the various communities and into the various counties to conduct voting clinics and block campaigns in order to do the job. And therefore, we are expanding our staff in order to do this, and I solicit your cooperation and your continued support and your prayers. For in a real sense the Negro cannot be free in Pasadena or Los Angeles until the Negro is free in Jackson, Mississippi and Montgomery, Alabama (Amen, Amen). We are all involved in a single struggle (Yes, Yes).

I would also like to bring greetings to you from a little city that you may have heard of along the way of life. It's called Montgomery, Alabama (Amen). Although I'm not living in Montgomery now, I am still intimately involved in the struggle there and in the affairs of the city, still associated with the Montgomery Improvement Association, and so I would like to bring greetings and special greetings from the fifty thousand Negro citizens of Montgomery who, just a few years ago, came to see that it is ultimately more honorable to walk in dignity than ride in humiliation. (Amen) A people who decided to substitute tired feet for tired souls (Amen) and walk the streets of Montgomery until the sagging walls of bus segregation were finally crushed (Amen, Amen, Amen). And I'm happy to report this morning that the buses of Montgomery, Alabama are thoroughly integrated. And after three hundred and eighty-one days of suffering and sacrifice, Negro passengers can sit any-

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4 King continued to serve on the MIA's executive board after his departure from Montgomery.
where on the buses that they want to (Amen, Amen) We were able to achieve this significant victory not only because of our sacrifices but because millions of people of good will all over this nation and all over the world were willing to walk with us (Yes), and above all God walked with us (That's it, Amen, Oh Lord) Therefore, a new day is developing in Alabama and all over our nation

I would like to have you think with me for the moments left from the subject “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” From time to time, we hear that in order for certain things to be complete they must be three-dimensional I think you occasionally hear this from Hollywood—that in order for the movie or the picture to be complete today it needs to be three-dimensional And I would like to attempt to set forth the thesis this morning that if life is to be complete it too must be three-dimensional

Many, many centuries ago a man by the name of John was in prison out on a lonely, obscure island called Patmos, and in such a setting he was deprived of every freedom but the freedom to think And so out there in that dark and desolate situation he had a rendezvous with eternity (Yes, Oh yes), and he looked up and imagined that he saw something (Oh, Praise the Lord) He wrote about it over in the Book of Revelation He said, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth (That's it, That's it, Oh yes) descending out of heaven from God (Praise the Lord), I saw the new Jerusalem” (Yes) One of the greatest glories of this new city of God that John saw was its completeness (Oh yes, Yes) It was not partial and one-sided (All right, Amen), but it was complete in all three of its dimensions (All right, Yes) And so in describing the city over in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation in the sixteenth verse, John says this “The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal” (Amen, Praise the Lord, Come on) In other words, this new city of God, this city of ideal humanity is not an unbalanced entity (Well), but it is complete on all sides (Praise the Lord, praise the Lord) Now, John is saying something here quite significant For many of us the Book of Revelation is a difficult book, puzzling to decode, and we tend to think of it as something of a great enigma wrapped in mystery, and I guess if you look at the Book of Revelation as a record of actual historical occurrences it is a difficult book shrouded with impenetrable mysteries (Oh yes) But if you will look beneath the peculiar jargon of vocabulary of the author and the prevailing symbolism, you will see in the Book of Revelation many eternal truths which forever challenge us (Amen, Amen, Well) And one such truth is the truth of this text, for what John is really saying is this that life as it should be and life at its best is a life that is complete on all sides (Amen, Amen, Come on) And so there are three dimensions of any complete life to which we can fitly give the words of our text length, breadth, and height (Right) Now, the length of life, as we shall use it here, is not its duration, not how long it lasts, not how long you live, but it is the push of a life forward to achieve its inner powers and ambitions It is the, it is the inward concern for one's own welfare (Oh yes) The breadth of life is the outreach, the outward concern for the welfare of others, and the height of life is the upward reach for God (Amen, Amen) If life is to be complete, these three must be together, in other words, life at its best is
something of a triangle. At one angle stands the individual person, at the other
angle stands other persons, and at the top stands the supreme infinite person—
God. (Yes, Amen) If your life is to be complete, all three must work harmoniously
together and be properly cultivated (Praise the Lord, Yes), for the complete life is the
three-dimensional life (Well).

Now, let us look for the moment at the length of life. I have said that this is a
dimension of life in which the individual is concerned with developing his inner
powers. In a sense, this is the selfish dimension of life, and there is such a thing as
rational and moral self-interest. If you aren't concerned about yourself, you aren't
really going to be concerned about other selves (Oh yes, That's right). Some years
ago, a brilliant Jewish rabbi, Joshua Liebman, wrote a book entitled Peace of Mind,
and he has a chapter in that book entitled "Love Thyself Properly."6 (All right) And
what he says in substance in that chapter is that before you can love other people
adequately you got to love your own self properly (Amen). Many people have been
plunged into the abyss of emotional fatalism because they didn't love themselves
properly (Praise the Lord, All right). And, therefore, we have a legitimate right to be
concerned about ourselves, and we must be so concerned about ourselves that we
set out early in life to discover what we are made for (Amen, All right), for God has
called up all of us to do something. He has given all of us certain abilities, and we
must use them; after we discover them, we must use them well (Praise the Lord, All
right). Some maybe have five talents, some two, some one, but the important thing
is that you do the best with whatever you have (That's it, Amen, Oh yes) And there is
always a "well done" waiting (Well), well done by good and faithful servants, when
the job is done.7 So we must set out to discover (Yes) what we are called to do and
what we are made for, and then after we discover it, we should set out to do it with
all of the strength and all of the power that we have in our system (Well, Oh help him).

When you discover your life's worth (All right), set out to do it so well that the living,
the dead, or the unborn (Oh Lord) couldn't do it better (Praise the Lord, Yes, Amen).

And no matter what it is, never consider it insignificant because if it is for the
upbuilding of humanity (Yes) it has cosmic significance. (Amen, Yes) And so if it falls
your lot to be a street sweeper (That's it, Well), sweep streets like Rafael painted
pictures. Sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble (Amen, Well). Sweep streets
like Beethoven composed music. (Oh yeah, Have mercy) Sweep streets (Amen) like
Shakespeare wrote poetry (Amen). Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven
and earth will have to pause and say, "Here lived a great street sweeper (That's it,
Amen) who swept his job well."8 (Praise the Lord, Amen) Douglas Malloch put it in a
beautiful little poem:

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley
But be the best little shrub (That's right) on the side of the hill
Be a bush if you can't be a tree (Yes)
If you can't be a highway, just be a trail

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6 Liebman, Peace of Mind, pp. 38–58
7 Cf. Matthew 25:14–30
8 King once attributed this illustration to Benjamin Mays (King, "Facing the Challenge of a New
Age," 1 January 1957, in Papers 4, 79)
If you can't be the sun, be a star (Amen)
For it isn't by size that you win or you fail,
Be the best of whatever you are 9 (Yes, Amen, All right)

And when you do this you've mastered the length of life (Oh yes, Well) This onward push to the end of realizing your inner capacity (All right) is a length of a man's life But don't stop here (Praise the Lord, All right) It's dangerous to stop with the length of life (Praise the Lord) And some people never get beyond this first dimension, they live life as if nobody else lived in the world but themselves (Yes, All right, Praise the Lord, Well) And other people become mere steps by which they climb to their personal ends and ambitions And if they manage to get around to loving, it becomes a utilitarian love, they love only those people that they can use (Yes, That's right, that's right) My friends, I say to you this morning that there is nothing more tragic than to see an individual bogged down in the length of life (That's it, That's it), devoid of the breadth. And so we must add breadth to length

Now, the breadth of life is that dimension in which we are concerned about others. As I've said, it is the outward concern for the welfare of others (Oh yes) And I submit to you this morning that an individual hasn't begun to live until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity (Oh yes) One day a man went running up to Jesus, and he wanted to raise some significant questions (Praise the Lord, Well) He got around finally to the question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Well) Now, that could have very easily led to a philosophical debate. It could have very easily ended up in the abstract. That question could have been left out somewhere in midair (Well, All right), but Jesus immediately pulled that question out of midair and placed it on a dangerous curb between Jerusalem and Jericho 10 (Oh yes) And he talked about a certain man (Praise the Lord), a certain man that fell among thieves (Sure enough, sure enough) He went on to say that three men passed by (Sure enough, sure enough, Well) One was a priest, one was a Levite (Well) And they passed by on the other side, they didn't stop to help him. And finally another man came (Well), a man of another race (Yes, All right), and he stopped and helped the man there on the ground, and history had said that he was a good man 11 Now, he was good because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou" He was good because he could rise above the length of life and incorporate the breadth (Praise the Lord, Yes) Now, we have a lot of theories about why these other two men passed by on the other side Sometimes we say that they were probably busy going to some church meeting and they just didn't have time (Yes, Well), that's a possibility And then it's possible that they could have been going down to Jerusalem, to Jericho, to establish a Jericho road improvement association I don't know, that's a possibility [laughter]

But the fact is that they passed by on the other side. And I have another theory when I use my imagination about this thing. You know it's possible that they passed on by because they were afraid (Amen, Well) You see, the Jericho road is a danger-

9 King recites lines from Douglas Malloch's poem, "Be the Best of Whatever You Are" (1926)
10 Cf Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus, p 150
11 Luke 10 25-37
A few months ago, about eight months ago, Mrs. King and I were in Jerusalem, and we rented a car and drove down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now, you know that Jerusalem is way above sea level, some twenty-six hundred feet above sea level, and Jericho is a thousand feet below sea level. And I said to my wife as we were driving around this Jericho road that this is the, it’s easy to understand why Jesus used it as a setting for his parable. This is a meandering, curvy, dangerous road, and it’s very conducive for robbery and that type of thing.

And I could easily see then why Jesus used it as the occasion, and something said to me then that it’s possible that those brothers that passed by on the other side were really afraid because it is dangerous on the Jericho road. And first, they could have thought that if they stopped and helped the man the robbers were still around, and they might have come out there, robbed them, and beat them, and left them there. Or they could have thought that the man on the ground was a faker and that he really was there in order to get them over there, and something would happen to them. So that the first question that the Levite raised, the first question that the priest raised was “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” The good Samaritan by the very nature of his concern reversed the question “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?” Therefore, he was a great man because he had the mental equipment for a dangerous altruism. He was a great man because he could rise above his self-concern to the broader concern of his brother. He was a great man because he saw the power of the breadth of life, not only the length of life.

And my friends, I am convinced that this is the basis of our problem in the area of race relations today. This is our problem in the South, and this is our problem over the United States. Many of our white brothers are concerned only about the length of life, their preferred economic positions, their political power, their so-called way of life. If they would ever rise up and add breadth to length, the other-regarding dimension to the self-regarding dimension, we would be able to solve all of the problems. In our nation today And I say this morning that the United States of America may go out in the world and produce all that she can possibly bear, possibly produce in guided missiles. She may astound the world with her great resources or wealth, but if men and women of this nation are not concerned about the breadth of life, and not concerned about the length of life, America died because too many of her people were concerned about the length of life and not concerned about the breadth of life. And is it only necessary within a nation, it’s necessary on the international hori-
zon (Well, All right), for the breadth of life simply means that every individual and every nation realize that nobody can live alone in this world (Yes) We are all made to live together (Well, Oh yes, All right) It was my good fortune to journey over to that great country in the Far East known as India a few months ago, and it was the most rewarding experience to move around that great nation and meet the great leaders of that country, from Prime Minister Nehru on down to the village councilmen (Well), and then to talk with the ordinary people of that country in the villages around (All right) It was a most rewarding experience. But as I stood there in that great country (Yes), I say to you this morning that there were those depressing moments, for how can one avoid being depressed (All right) when he sees with his own eyes millions of people going to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks at night? Had no beds to sleep in, no houses to sleep in In Calcutta alone, more than a million people sleep on the sidewalks every night In Bombay, more than six hundred thousand people sleep on the sidewalks at night. How can one avoid being depressed when he discovers that out of India’s population about four hundred million people, more than three hundred million make a annual income of less than sixty dollars a year? And most of these people have never seen a doctor or a dentist.

And as I stood there and noticed these conditions, something within me cried out (Lord), “Can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned about these conditions?” And some answer came out saying, “Oh no” (All right), because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India (Oh yeah, Well) And, therefore, we should use our vast resources of wealth to aid these undeveloped countries that are undeveloped because the people have been dominated politically (Well), exploited economically, segregated, and humiliated across the centuries by foreign powers (Well) And I found myself saying maybe we in the United States have spent far too much money in establishing military bases around the world rather than establishing bases of genuine concern and understanding (That’s right, Yes) And all I’m saying this morning is that all life is interrelated (Well) We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, whatever affects one individual directly, it affects all indirectly (Yes, Well, Oh yeah, All right) Therefore [recording interrupted] life (Oh yes)

But don’t stop here either (Well, That’s it) Some people never get beyond the first two dimensions of life (Praise the Lord, Well) They develop their inner power brilliantly. They have a concern for humanity in many instances. Sometimes they love humanity so much that they conclude that humanity is God These are the people who find themselves seeking to live life without a sky (Oh yes, All right) But I say to you this morning that if life is to be complete, the individual must reach up beyond his self-interest, the individual must reach up beyond humanity (All right) and reach up high enough to discover God (Praise the Lord, Amen) Now, I know some of you are asking now, “Reverend, why would you mention this dimension?”

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13 While visiting India during February 1959, King dined with India’s prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru (King, “Notes for Conversation between King and Nehru,” in Papers 5 130)
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Why do you bring this up? You’re in church, and we’re in church, and the fact that we’re here in such large numbers, and the fact that we’re in church means that we believe in God, and why would you mention this? (Well) Well, there is some truth in that. The fact that you are here means, I guess, that at least you agree that there is a God. But you know there is a distinction between intellectual assent and real belief. (Amen, Yes, Amen) Intellectual assent is merely agreeing that something is true, belief is acting like it is true. (That’s right, All right) And so often we find people who agree that there is a God, and they pay lip service to God, but they live as if there is no God in the universe. (Oh yes, Amen, Lord have mercy) These are the people who have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. [laughter] And so the atheism that pervades our society today is not theoretical atheism so much but practical atheism—living as if there is no God.

And how often do we find ourselves paying lip service to God but not life service? (That’s right) We just become involved in other things. We become so involved in getting our big cars and our big bank accounts and our beautiful homes that we unconsciously forget about this third dimension. (That’s it, That’s right) We become so involved in looking at the man-made lights of the city that we unconsciously forget to look up and think about that great cosmic light. (Well) It gets up early in the morning in the eastern horizon and paints its technicolor across the blue, a light that man could never make. (That’s it, that’s it) We become so involved in looking at our skyscraping buildings, and we unconsciously forget to think about the gigantic mountains (That’s it) kissing the sky (That’s it), something that man could never make. (Oh yes) We become so involved and fascinated (Well) about our radar and our televisions (Well) that we unconsciously forget to think about the beautiful stars that bedeck the heavens, like swinging lanterns of eternity. (Oh yeah, That’s it), something that man could never make. (Well, Amen) We become so involved and fascinated by man’s progress in the scientific realm (Well, Yes sir), we unconsciously find ourselves believing that man can usher in a new world unaided by any divine power. (Well, Oh yes) And so when we turn around and come to ourselves we discover that we’ve gone a whole day’s journey not knowing that God isn’t with us. (Well, That’s it, Oh yes, Yes, Oh yes) But I submit to you (Well) that if life is to be complete (That’s it) we must discover God. (That’s it, Oh yes)

And don’t worry about our new scientific developments. We must continue to break out and break into the storehouse of nature and bring out many precious insights. (Well, That’s right) but never believe that because of our new developments in the scientific realm God’s being is diminished. (Well, All right) But I tell you today God is still around (That’s it, Oh yes) Even if we can’t see Him, He’s still here. (Praise the Lord, praise the Lord) The great things in this universe you can never see. Go out and look at the stars at night, and you think you see all. Oh no! You can never see the law of gravitation that holds them there. (That’s it, that’s it) Run out into your city, look at the beautiful buildings, if you will, and all of the beautiful architecture. Look at this church, if you will, with its beautiful architecture, and maybe you think you see all. Oh no! (Well, All right) You can never see the mind of the architect who drew the blueprint. (That’s right) You can never see the faith and the hope and the love of the individual who made it so. (Well, That’s it)

This morning I see you (That’s it) saying to yourselves, “We see Martin Luther King.” And I hate to disappoint you. You don’t see Martin Luther King (All right), you see my body. (Talk, talk, Come on, come on) You can never see my mind; you can
never see my personality (*That's it, that's it*); you can never see the me which makes me me. (*Oh yes, Come on*) So in the final analysis, everything that you see in this universe is a shadow cast by that which you do not see. (*Yes, Sure enough*) Visible is a shadow cast by the invisible. (*Yes*) So this morning I can cry out to you that even though we can't see God He's *still* around! (*Yes*) God is still here. (*All right, All right*) And so if we are to live a complete life, let us discover Him. And if you will discover this God (*Praise the Lord*), things will change in life. (*Oh yes, Oh yes*) People all around you will wonder how you are able to make it amid the dark and desolate moments. (*Oh yes, All right*) In the midst of the difficulties (*Yes*), you will be able to stand up with an inner calmness. (*Well, Oh yes*)
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A reporter asked me some days ago (What), "Dr. King, aren’t you afraid living in the tension of the South and the daily threats that you and your family get (Well) and all of the harassment that you have to constantly go through? How is it that you keep going?" (Well, Yes, All right) And I said to him, "I have but one answer (Praise the Lord, That’s it) First, I think that this cause is right. (Well, All right) And since it is right I believe that God is with it because God is on the side of right (Amen, Amen, Yes) And therefore, I can go on with a faith (Well, Praise the Lord) that because God is with the struggle for the good life (Well, Oh yes), victory is inevitable." (Sure enough) No matter what comes (All right), no matter how difficult the moments may be. (Well, Praise the Lord, Oh yes), if you gain this feeling that God is with you (Well, Yes), all of the powers in hell below (That’s it, That’s it, Amen, Oh yes) and all of the evils and the principalities of evil can’t destroy you because you have a faith (That’s right).

And, therefore, I leave you by saying, "I have a faith" (That’s right, Oh yes, Oh yes) Somebody is crying out, "Where is that faith? Is it in good health?" No (Praise the Lord, Well, All right) For I have lived just a few years but I’ve come to see that you can’t depend on good health (That’s all right, Sure enough) You may be in good health today and plunged to the nadir of bad health tomorrow (Sure enough, Oh yes) You may be elevated to the heights of physical security today (Sure enough, Yes) and tomorrow inflicted with some incurable disease (Yes) that will be with you the remainder of your days (Yes, Sure enough) So my faith is not in good health (Sure enough), but I have a faith (Talk to me, Yes) “Is it in a long life?” No (Well, Praise the Lord, Yes) But I have come to see now that I’m involved in a dangerous struggle for my people (Sure enough, sure enough, Yes), and I don’t know what the future holds in that sense (All right) Maybe I will not get to see my three-score years and ten (Sure enough, Come on) So now I’ve come to the conclusion that I can’t put my ultimate faith in a long life, but I have a faith (Sure enough, All right, Oh yeah) “Is your faith in economic security?” No (Sure enough, Will?) For dollars are here today and gone tomorrow (Sure enough, sure enough, Oh yes, Yes Lord) My faith is not in the dollar, but I have a faith (Talk, Yes) “Is it in the United States of America?” No (Sure enough, sure enough, Well) For every now and then I think about America and I get worried about it (Sure enough, sure enough, Oh yeah, That’s it) So my ultimate faith is not in America (Sure enough, Sure enough, sure enough), but I have a faith (Oh yes) “Is your ultimate faith in Western civilization?” No (Well, Lord help him) But I look at Western civilization, and I wonder sometimes if Western civilization will be able to survive (Oh yes, Sure enough, sure enough) When I go back and read Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I find that the parallels between Western civilization and the Roman empire are frightening 14 (Sure enough, sure enough) And I’m not so sure now whether Western civilization will be able to survive, but I have a faith (Sure enough, Yes, Sure enough, sure enough)

“Is your faith in organized religion?” Not totally (Catch your breath) Yes, my faith is in the church, within the church. That spiritual (Yes) church (Oh yes), but sometimes I get worried about our particular churches We are busy warring among ourselves (Oh yes, Sure enough), caught up in narrow sectarianism, giving out sanction to the status quo (Yes) Slavery couldn’t have survived in America if the church hadn’t

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14 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788)
sanctioned it. *(That's it, that's it)* Segregation would be dead as a doornail in the
South today if the Southern white church took a stand against it. *(Sure enough, sure
enough)* So today I say to you that my ultimate faith is not in organized religion, but
I have a faith. *(Yes)* "What is that faith?" *(Sure enough)* I say to you this morning that
my faith is in the eternal *God* *(All right)*, whose purpose changes not. *(Sure enough,
sure enough)* So I can cry out:

Oh God, our help in ages past *(Talk, Yes)*,
our hope for years to come *(Sure enough, Sure enough)*,
our shelter in the time of storm,
and *our eternal home* *(Sure enough, sure enough)*
Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting Thou art God,
to endless years the same.\(^{15}\)

This is my faith And I choose to go on through my days with this faith I tell you
if you catch it, you will be able to rise from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of
hope. *(Yes)* Love yourself, you are commanded to do that *(Well)* That is the length
of life *(Well)* Love your neighbor as you love yourself *(Oh yeah)*, you are com-
manded to do that That's the breadth of life *(Well, Oh yes)* But never forget that
there is a first and even greater commandment Love the Lord thy God with all thy
*heart* *(Oh yes)*, with all thy *soul* *(Yes)*, and with all thy *mind* *(Yes)* That is the height of
life And when you do this, you'll live the complete life Thank God for John who,
centuries ago, out on a lonely obscure island, caught vision of the new Jerusalem
And God grant to those of us who are left to live life, who have kept the vision *(Oh
yes)* and decide to move toward that city of complete life in which the length, and
the breadth *(Oh yes)*, and the height are equal *(Oh yes, Yes, Amen, My Lord)*

At JBC

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\(^{15}\) Isaac Watts, "O God Our Help in Ages Past" *(1719)*

"Love in Action" I

*[3 April 1960]*
*[Atlanta, Ga]*

Throughout his pastoral career, King developed several sermons on love, including
this handwritten outline exploring forgiveness and living in accordance with God's
teaching.\(^{1}\)

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\(^{1}\) King later developed this sermon further and included it in a thematic series (King, "Levels of
Love," Sermon Delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church, 16 September 1962, pp 437-445 in this volume)