It is quite possible for one to seek to solve this problem by making every-
thing and everybody atone for one's predicament. All of their frustration
are distilled into a core of bitterness that expresses itself in hardness of atti-
tude and a total mercilessness. They take out their disappointment on
someone else. You have seen people like that
(1) cruel to their mate
(2) inhuman to children
In short they are mean
(a) they are bitter
(b) They are cynical
(c) they are loveless
(D) They find fault in everything and everybody. They always com-
plain. They have a demonical grudge against life.9

Some people try to deal with the problem by withdrawing completely into
themselves
The final alternative is creative. It involves the exercise of a great and cre-
ative will.10

Our sermon today brings us face to face with one of the most persistent realities
in human experience. Very few people are privileged to live life with all of their
dreams realized and all of their hopes fulfilled. Who here this morning has not had
to face the agony of blasted hopes and shattered dreams?

One of the best examples of this problem is found in the life of the Apostle Paul
In the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Romans, which we read in the scripture les-
sion for the morning, we find Paul writing these words to the Roman Christians
"Whenever I go into Spain, I will come unto you." In other words, "Whenever I go
to Spain, I will stop by to see you." This was one of the high hopes of Paul's life, the
desire to go to Spain, the edge of the then known world, and carry the gospel of
Jesus Christ to that distant land. And on his way to Spain he would stop by to see the
Christians in Rome, the capital city of the world. He looked forward to the day that
he would have personal fellowship with that little group of people that he referred
to in the greetings of his letter as "Christians in the household of Caesar." This was
his great hope. This was his great dream. And all of his life now would be turned

9 Thurman, Deep River, p. 37. "It is quite possible to become obsessed with the idea of making every-
things and everybody atone for one's predicament. All one's frustrations may be distilled into a core of bit-
terness and disillusionment that expresses itself in a hardness of attitude and a total mercilessness—in
short, one may become mean. You have seen people like that. They seem to have a demonical grudge
against life." King paraphrased this text on the verso of a 12 October 1960 letter from Coretta Scott King
to Velma Hall.

10 King added this final section (beginning with Roman numeral III) in a second pen.
toward the preparation of going to Spain and carrying the gospel there and of going to Rome, the capital of the world. This was his dream. This was his hope.

But let us notice what happened to this hope that gripped the life of Paul, to this dream that saturated his being. We will read the scripture carefully and delve into the history of Paul's life. We discover that Paul never got to Rome in the sense that he desired. He only got to Rome as a prisoner and not as a free man. He had to spend his days in Rome in a little cell because of his daring faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only that, Paul never got to travel the dusty roads of Spain, to notice its curvaceous slopes and the busyness of its coast life, because he died a martyr's death in Rome. The story of Paul's life is the story, the tragic story, of unfulfilled hopes and shattered dreams.

But in a real sense, my friends, this is the persistent story of life. Almost everybody here this morning has started out on some distant trip to reach some distant Spain, to achieve some distant goal, to realize some distant dream, only to discover that life stopped far short of that. We never got an opportunity to walk as free men in the Romes of our lives. We ended up so often confined in a little cell that had been built up around us by the forces of circumstance. This is the story of life.

This reveals to us that there is a tragic element in life. We must never overlook it. If the early Christian church didn't overlook it, we must not overlook it. The early Christians, they were bringing together the books of the Bible, did not leave out of the gospel the event that took place on Calvary Hill. That was a tragic event. It was a dark moment in history. And the universe crucified its most noble character. We must never forget that that stands at the center of the Christian gospel which reveals to us that there is an element of tragedy in life, there is a cross at the center of it. That as we face life and all of its problems, we see this element as tragic. Life is not a great symphony with all of the instruments playing harmoniously together. We will look at it long enough, we will discover that there is a jangling discord in life that has somehow thrown the symphony out of whack. The nagging, prehensile tentacles of evil are always present, taking some of the meaning out of life.

Many people have often looked at this, and they've gotten frustrated about it, and they've wondered if life had any justice in it. Long years ago the philosopher Schopenhauer looked at it. He said that life is nothing but a tragic comedy played over and over again with slight changes in costume and scenery. Long time ago Shakespeare's Macbeth looked at it. He said that life has no meaning in the final analysis. Why? Because life turns out to be sound and furred in so many instances. A good while ago, even in our own nation, Paul Laurence Dunbar looked at it. And all that he could come out with was saying:

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,

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11 Cf. Meek, "Strength in Adversity"
12 King paraphrases segments of Arthur Schopenhauer's chapter "On History" in The World as Will and Idea, 3 224-227
13 Shakespeare, Macbeth, act 5, sc. 5 "Life's a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing"
And never a laugh that the moans come double,
And that is life!  14

We've looked at this so often, and we've become frustrated, wondering if life has any justice. We look out at the stars, we find ourselves saying that these stars shine from their cold and serene and passionless height, totally indifferent to the joys and sorrows of men. We begin to ask, is man a plaything of a callous nature, sometimes friendly and sometimes inimical? Is man thrown out as a sort of orphan in the terrifying immensities of space, with nobody to guide him on and nobody concerned about him? These are the questions we ask, and we ask them because there is an element of tragedy in life.

We come back to that point of our text and of our prophet. We come to the point of seeing in life that there are unfulfilled hopes. There are moments when our dreams are not realized. And so we discover in our lives, soon or later, that all pain is never relieved. We discover, soon or later, that all hopes are never realized. We come to the point of seeing that no matter how long we pray for them, and no matter how long we cry out for a solution to our problems, no matter how much we desire it, we don't get the answer. The only answer that we get is a fading echo of our desperate cry, of our lonely cry. So we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying that the cup would be removed from him. 15 But he has to drink it with all of its bitterness and all of its pain. We find Paul praying that the thorn would be removed from his flesh, but it is never removed, and he is forced to go all the way to the grave with it. 16 And so in this text, we find Paul wanting to go to Spain with a, for a noble purpose, to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to Spain. Paul never gets to Spain. He ends up in Rome, not as a free man but as a man in prison. This is the story of life. In so many instances, it becomes the arena of unrealized dreams and unfulfilled hopes, frustration with no immediate solution in the environment.

Now, the question that I want to try to grapple with you this, with this morning is this: what do you do when you find your dreams unrealized, your hopes unfulfilled, and you see no basic solution in your environment to the problem that you are facing? How do you deal with it?

Now, some people deal with this problem, as you well know, by getting caught up in the response of bitterness. They feel that the best way, they end up dealing with their frustration by taking out their anger with the universe, their anger with life, on other people and other things. In short, they become mean.

Have you ever seen mean people? Now, sometimes you take a good psychological analysis of that person. You look back, and you discover that that person had a distant Spain in mind that he wanted to go to, and he had a great hope and a great desire and because of the forces of circumstance something happened and he never got to that Spain. And he ended up confined in a little cell of life that had been brought up and built up around him by the very forces of circumstance. And

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14 King quotes from Dunbar's poem "Life" (1895)
15 Matthew 26:39
16 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
now he lives in his cell, bitter and angry with life, and he has a sort of demonical grudge against life. This is his response. And he seeks to solve his frustration by taking all of this out on other people. And so maybe sometimes he’s mean to his children, or he’s mean to his wife, or she’s mean to her husband, or mean to people round and about because he can’t find life itself. Life is intangible in a sense, it’s invisible. We, we, we don’t see life, we see the manifestations of life. And you can never take life and hit life and beat up on life. And so he discovers that he can’t get life itself to beat on and pay back for what the universe has done to him, so he finds people that are tangible, and he finds things that are tangible, and he takes this bitterness and this hate out on these things. And this is the solution to his problem, he thinks. The bitterness within, and the anger, he becomes angry with the universe. And he fights the universe through people and things. This is one way that people deal with this problem of unfulfilled hopes. They react with bitterness and mercilessness and meanness.

Well, there is another way that people often follow. They may withdraw completely into themselves. This is often a way that people use. They withdraw completely within themselves, and very happily they build the walls around themselves, and they don’t allow anybody to penetrate. And they develop detachment into a neat and fine art. And so they look out into the world through eyes that have burned out. They end up with a cold and dead stare. They solve their problem, they feel, through the silence of hate. They are neither happy nor unhappy. They are just indifferent. You’ve seen people like this, broken down by the storms of life, beat down by the weight of circumstance. And they are not fighting it with bitterness on the one hand, but they are fighting it with a silent hate. They withdraw from people, and they withdraw from the world. They withdraw from everything and turn totally within. This, they feel, is a solution to the problem. But that isn’t it.

There is another way, which I think is a more creative way. And that is, it involves the exercise of a great and dynamic will. This is the individual who stands up in his circumstances and stands up amid the problem, faces the fact that his hopes are unfulfilled. And then he says, “I have one thing left. Life has beaten it down, it has broken away from me many things, sometime my physical body. But at least it has left me with a will, and I will assert this, and I refuse to be stopped.” Even if Rome and Spain are blocked off of my itinerary, I refuse to be stopped.” And this is the man who stands up in the greatness of life. He discovers the power and the creativity of the human will, and he faces any circumstance with the power and the force of his will. And he has a sort of dogged determination. This is what Paul Tillich, the great philosopher and theologian of our age, means when he writes a book entitled The

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17 Thurman, *Deep River*, p 38 “Or such persons may withdraw completely into themselves. Very carefully they build a wall around themselves and let no one penetrate it. They carry the technique of detachment to a highly developed art. Such people are not happy, nor are they unhappy, but are completely indifferent. They look out on life through eyes that have burned out, and nothing is left but a dead, cold stare.”

18 Thurman, *Deep River*, pp 38–39 “The final alternative is creative—thought of in terms of a second wind. It involves the exercise of a great and dynamic will.”

19 Meek, *Strength in Adversity* “We cannot, we must not, stop even though Spain and Rome are crossed off our itinerary.”
Courage to Be\textsuperscript{20} He says in that book that all around man is the threat of nonbeing. The man who has adjusted to modern life, the man who lives with creativity in the modern world, is the individual who stands amid the thrust of nonbeing and has the courage to be, in spite of all. And this is the way that Paul faced his problem. This is the way that any great Christian faces his problem. The hopes are not fulfilled, and the dreams are not realized. He says that I have one thing left and that is the power of the will. And I refuse to be stopped. I’ll stand up amid life and the circumstances of life. Every now and then it will beat me, push me to this side and to that side, but I will stand up to it. I will not be stopped.

The other day we were flying to London.\textsuperscript{21} I remember the pilot said to us that the flight coming back from London would be four hours longer than the flight going over to London. You know, these jet planes can go from New York to London in five hours and a half, but it takes them about nine hours to get back from London to New York. He said, now, the reason it is like this is that going over to London, you, you, you have a tailwind and it helps you to get in there fast. But coming back from London to New York you have strong headwinds, and that slows you up, it makes it kind of difficult to get in. You can’t go in with the same speed, to go from London to New York. But I started thinking about the fact that if, even if that plane is four hours late, it battles through that wind somehow, and it gets to New York. That’s the important thing. It gets off at London earlier, and it gets to New York later, but it does get to New York because it gets in itself the power to endure and go through the wind, even when they are pushing against them.

And this, I think, we find in this a parallel to life that often we have strong tailwinds, and we move through life with ease, and things work in our favor, and everything is bright, and everything is happy. The sunshine of life is glowing radiantly in our eyes. These are bright and marvelous and happy days. But there will come moments when life will present headwinds before you. It seems that as you move something is blocking you. Circumstance after circumstance, disaster after disaster, stand in your path and beat up against you. And who is the man of creativity? He is the man who is determined to move on in spite of the headwinds. And who says somehow, “I might get in late, but I’m gonna get in because I have a strong and determined will in spite of the winds of circumstance that blow against me.” Now, this is what Paul did in his own life. And this is what we have to do. We must get within ourselves, cultivate within ourselves, the power of a dynamic will and have the determination to move on amid every circumstance.

When we study history, when we read biography, we find it is a running commentary on this. We appreciate John Milton. We read Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained with great joy and great appreciation, but we appreciate it even more when we discover that he wrote it when he was blind.\textsuperscript{22} We read Longfellow as he translates Dante [\textit{Alighieri}]. We think of the greatness, this poet translating the works of another great poet. Then, we appreciate Longfellow even more when even we dis-

\begin{footnotesize}
21 On 3 February 1959, the Kings and SCLC historian Lawrence D Reddick flew from New York City to London as they began a six-week trip to India and the Middle East.
22 John Milton lost his sight in 1651
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cover that a few days before he started translating Dante, the dress of his wife accidently caught fire. And he tried desperately to put the fire out, but he couldn’t put it out. It injured her to the point that she died a few days later. Here, we see that fatherless, motherless man sitting in his lonely room, turning to the translation of Dante in order to bring meaning in life. And he did it well. We see Helen Keller, and we appreciate her. We appreciate her even more when we discover that here is a person been thrown into a little cell of blindness and deafness, can’t see, can’t hear, but yet in spite of that she wouldn’t be stopped. She was determined to be in the midst of nonbeing. She was determined to assert her will in the midst of tragic circumstances. And even though she didn’t achieve the Spain of sight to see the beauties of nature, she achieved an inner sight, which all of the men and women of this world appreciate. We will but look and see these individuals. We will see them with a beauty and a power.

I remember just last year I was out to Little Rock, Arkansas, at the time of the commencement exercise at Central High School, and I had the privilege of going in that evening. I think they had only about eight or ten Negroes who were able to get in because they had to have invitations, and Ernest Green, who was the only Negro graduate, extended an invitation, and I went into that commencement. There were many things there that I remember, but one of the things that I remember more than anything else is that, as they were going across the platform getting their diploma, I remember very vividly a student going up on the arms of two other students. He had been taken out of a little chair going up, and I heard noises and shouts and cheers all over the grandstand. I am sure that for no athlete that had ever played out there in that field, in that stadium, I am sure that they had never gotten cheers like this boy got. And I watched him as he went up. And here was a boy who, I understand, started out in school, and he did an excellent job, was one of the star students of his class. One day when he was in class at Central High, and he was there, and the teacher didn’t know him. The teacher said, “Stand up.” And he said, “I’m sorry, I haven’t stood up since I was four years old.” But that boy had something else. The power of a creative will. His body was broken. The forces of circumstance had inflicted pain upon him. The forces of circumstance had taken something away from him that he desperately longed for, I’m sure. Some Spain that would give him, would have given him a certain physical integration that he wanted, I’m sure. Yet, he didn’t have it. But he had one thing left. And that was the power of a dynamic will. This is what can take you through.

I look back over the dark days of slavery. Let nobody fool you about it. We can romanticize all we want to about the beauty of slavery. There are those who would

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23 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published his 1867 translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* after his wife Fanny Appleton burned to death in a household accident in 1861.

24 Little Rock’s Central High School was the center of a national controversy in September 1957 when Governor Orval Faubus deployed the Arkansas national guard to prevent the enrollment of nine black students. President Eisenhower eventually commanded the national guardsmen to uphold the *Brown* decision and desegregate the high school. The “Little Rock Nine” successfully entered Central High on 25 September. For King’s response to the use of military troops in Little Rock, see King to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 25 September 1957, in Papers 4:278.
still try to romanticize about the beauty of slavery, and they, they have their minds back to those good old days. Slavery was a tragic thing. All that the Negro had to look forward to was rows of cotton, sizzling sun, the whip of the boss, and the barking of bloodhounds. This is what he faced. It is tragic to be cut off from some things, but there is nothing more tragic than to be cut off from your language, cut off from your family, cut off from your roots. This is what the Negro faced—going over in ships out of Africa, huddled up in ships, not able even to talk to each other, thrown up and brought over to distant countries to work, nothing in their past to hold on to. Yet, they are thrown here, all of the Spains of their lives pulled out, caught up in a Rome of prisonous slavery. And this is where they had to live. That's enough to beat anybody down, keep them from ever becoming anything, hold them back, and keep them from ever giving to history any contribution. That's enough, isn't it?

They had something left. The little preacher who didn't know his English grammar, who had never heard of Plato or Aristotle, who could never understand Einstein's theory of relativity, he'd look at them and say to them, "Now, you ain't no nigger. You ain't no slave but you God's children." They went out, they left feeling that they were God's children, that they had a will to carry them on even amid the darkness of slavery. And sometime they would begin to walk around the field, and they knew that it was dark in their lives. They knew that they had to walk there so often in bare feet, but they pictured the day when they would lay down their burdens and they could sing, "I'm so glad that troubles don't last always." And then you could hear an echo saying, "And I know my robe going to fit me well because I tried it on at the gates of hell. By and by, by and by, I'm gonna lay down my heavy load." These people, because of their creative, dynamic will, gave to this world something to keep it going, and they have given to this world contributions that the world will always have to be proud of. What gave to America the spiritual, which is the only original and creative music in this nation, gave to this world generations of young men and young women who've made marvelous contributions. For out of the black men and women of these dark days came a Marian Anderson, a Roland Hayes, and a Paul Robeson, to sing until the very fiber of men's souls is shaken. Out of these men and women came a Ralph Bunche to stand as one of the great diplomats of the world. Out of these men came a Booker T. Washington and a W. E. B.

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25. Thurman, *Deep River*, p. 35 "For the slave, freedom was not on the horizon, there stretched ahead the long road down which there marched in interminable lines only the rows of cotton, the sizzling heat, the riding overseer with his rawhide whip, the auction block where families were torn asunder, the barking of the bloodhounds—all this, but not freedom. Human slavery has been greatly romanticized by the illusion of distance, the mint julep, the long Southern twilight, and the lazy sweetness of blooming magnolias. But it must be intimately remembered that slavery was a dirty, sordid, inhuman business. There is no more hapless victim than one who is cut off from family, from language, from one's roots."

26. King may have drawn this anecdote from Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*, p. 50

27. King refers to the spiritual "I'm So Glad Trouble Don't Last Always."

28. King refers to the spiritual "Bye and Bye."

29. In 1950 Ralph J. Bunche received the Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic efforts on behalf of the United Nations during the 1948–1949 Arab-Israeli War. He corresponded with King during the Montgomery bus boycott (Bunche to King, 22 February 1956, and 21 November 1956, in Papers 3:134, 436, respectively).
Du Bois as great educators. Out of these black men and black women came Charles Drew to save us with blood plasma all over this world. Out of these black men and out of these black women came an E. Franklin Frazier to interpret sociologically the trends of our age. Out of these black men and these black women came a Paul Laurence Dunbar, a Countee Cullen, and a Langston Hughes to write poetry so that we can identify ourselves with reality through poetry. Out of these black men and these black women came something that keeps the generations going. If they had turned to the first method of bitterness, it wouldn’t have come. If they had withdrawn and turned to silent hate, it wouldn’t have come. But it came because of the creativity of the will and the dynamic quality of it, and the determination to stand up, amid all of those forces, amid all of the darkness of human circumstance.

And whenever a man comes to this point, he brings reality into the very center of his existence, and he brings new meaning and delight in the universe. And you know, strangely enough when you come to this point, you don’t worry about suffering. You don’t die because you don’t get to Spain. You come to see that suffering might make you stronger and bring you closer to the Almighty God.

The tree that never had to fight,
For sun and sky and air and light,
That stood out in the open plain
And always got its share of rain,
Never became a forest king,
But lived and died a scrubby thing

The man who never had to toil
By mind or hand in life’s turmoil,
But always won his share
Of sky and sun and light and air,
Never became a manly man,
But lived and died as he began

And never forget,
Good timber does not grow in ease
The stronger the wind, the tougher the tree
The farther sky, the greater length
The rougher the storm, the greater strength

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30 Educator Booker T Washington (1856–1915) founded Tuskegee Institute in 1881 and was a major spokesperson for African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) authored the groundbreaking book on African American life, *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He was a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and edited the organization’s journal *Crisus* until 1934. During the bus boycott he sent a poem to King (Du Bois to King, March 1956, see also King to Du Bois, 19 March 1956, in Papers 3 180).

31 Charles Drew (1904–1950) was a surgeon who is recognized for his work with blood plasma and blood banks.

32 Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier (1894–1962) authored *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939). In a 28 November 1960 letter, Frazier solicited information from King on "the work which your church is doing concerning marriage and family relations."

33 King refers to poets Dunbar, Cullen (1903–1946), and Hughes (1902–1967).
By sun and wind, by rain and snows,
In tree and men, good timber grows
Where thickest stand the forest grows
We find the patriarchs of both
And they hold converse with the stars,
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife
This is the common law of life

Discover this. Go out anew into the experiences of life. I assure you that you will meet your Spain, in the sense that you will never get there. You might get to your Rome as a prisoner, not as a free man. But if you have the power and the dynamics of a human will, nothing in all this world can stop you. Why? Because you refuse to be stopped. You have the dogged determination to exist and the courage to be. Let us pray.

Oh God, our gracious, heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the creative insights in the universe. We thank Thee for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past, who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank Thee for our foreparents, who've given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going. And grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will, so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world and in our lives. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.

At MLKCA ET61.

34 Cf. Douglas Malloch, "Good Timber" in Be the Best of Whatever You Are (Chicago: Scott Dowd, 1926), p. 31.
35 For an example of King's invitation to baptism, see final paragraph of "Man's Sin and God's Grace (1954–1960)", p. 391 in this volume.

My Call to the Ministry

7 August 1959

[Montgomery, Ala.]

Joan Thatcher, publicity director of the American Baptist Convention, asked King to compose this statement. In her request, Thatcher noted, "Apparently many of our young people still feel that unless they see a burning bush or a blinding light on the road to Damascus, they haven't been called."