real and the slumbering giants of gloom and hopelessness are on the verge of rising up in our souls. Therefore we never need walk in darkness. This was what the Psalmist meant when he said

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

This is the faith that will keep us going in our struggle to escape the bondage of every evil Egypt. This is the faith that will be a lamp unto our weary feet and a light unto our meandering path. If such a faith ever leaves the spirit of man, he will stand in immediate candidacy for nonbeing, and his highest dreams will go silently to the dust.

This sentence was altered in the published version. "Without such faith, man's highest dreams will pass silently to the dust" (p. 66). In the 1955 version, King concluded the sermon by turning from his analysis of segregation to one of "our own personal lives. There is not only an Egypt out in the world, but there are Egyptians in our souls. What is your Egyptian? Is it some corroding passion? Years, years ago you became its captive. Perhaps you cannot at all remember when. Perhaps, you were born into its captivity." King then reflected on the moment when "the conviction broke out within you like burning fire that this Egyptian could be conquered, that it could pass out of existence, finally dying upon the seashore." He ended the sermon with the observation: "Isn't this the peculiar insistence of the Christian religion? It is our conviction that if an individual sufficiently commits himself to Christ he can conquer any Egyptian that might well up in his soul. Christ is histories eternal Red Sea who, on the one hand, stands as Savior and Redeemer aiding the forces of good to escape some evil Egypt, and on the other hand, as judge condemning the forces of evil to ultimate doom. My friends, get out of Egypt! Get something done! Realize that your life is not made to be dominated by evil Egyptians. Go out and leave your Egyptian dead. Your ultimate destiny is the promised land."

King blends thoughts on unmet expectations from preachers Frederick Meek, Leslie Weatherhead, Howard Thurman, and J. Wallace Hamilton in this sermon. He writes that African Americans have "long dreamed of freedom," and asserts, "Moreover, through our suffering in this oppressive prison and our non-violent struggle to get out of it, we may give the kind of spiritual dynamic to western civilization that it so desperately needs to survive." As in the version of this sermon.
"When I take my journey into Spain, I will come unto you" Romans 15:24

Our sermon today brings us face to face with one of the most agonizing problems of human experience. Very few, if any, of us are able to see all of our hopes fulfilled. So many of the hopes and promises of our mortal days are unrealized.

Each of us, like Shubert, begins composing a symphony that is never finished. Hence, we have to face the agony of blasted hopes and shattered dreams.

If we turn back to the life of the Apostle Paul, we find a very potent example of this problem of disappointed hopes. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote, "When I take my journey into Spain, I will come unto you." It was one of Paul’s greatest hopes to go to Spain, the edge of the then known world, where he could further spread the Christian gospel. And on his way to Spain, he planned to visit that valiant group of Christians in Rome, the capital city of the world. He looked forward to the day when he would have personal fellowship with those people whom he greeted in his letter as “Christians in the household of Caesar.”

The more he thought about it the more his heart exuded with joy. All of his attention now was turned toward the preparation of carrying the gospel to the city of Rome with its many gods, and to Spain, the end of the then known world.

But notice what happened to this noble dream and this glowing hope that

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1. King, Unfulfilled Hopes, Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 5 April 1959, pp. 359–367 in this volume. King annotated the chapter titled “Shattered Dreams” in his personal copy of J. Wallace Hamilton’s Hom’s and Halos in Human Nature (pp. 25–34).

2. Franz Schubert (1797–1828), an Austrian composer, completed only two movements of his eighth symphony.


4. The phrase “If we turn back to the life of the Apostle Paul” was replaced by “In Paul’s letter to the Romans Christians” in the published version (King, Strength to Love, p. 78).

5. The preceding two sentences were altered in the published version. “On his return he wished to have personal fellowship with that valiant group of Roman Christians” (p. 78).

6. In the published version “His preparations now centered in carrying the gospel to the capital city of Rome and Spain at the distant fringe of the empire” (p. 78). Meek, “Strength in Adversity.” Paul had high hopes of going to Spain, the edge of the then known world, that he might take there his word about the Christian Gospel. And on the way he planned to visit the Christian folk in Rome, the capital city of the world. Paul wanted to see that little valiant group of Christians, folk whom he saluted in his letter as “Christians in the household of Caesar.” The more he thought about his planned journey, the more his heart was warmed by it. Imagine, Rome with its many gods and with its great power, subject to the Christian Gospel.”
joy. All of his attention now would be turned toward the preparation
of carrying the gospel to the city of Rome [with its many gods] and to
Spain the end of the then known world.

But notice what happened to this noble dream and this glowing
hope that gripped Paul's life. He never got to Rome in the sense that
he had hoped. He went there only as a prisoner and not as a free man.
He spent his days in that ancient city in a little prison cell because
of his daring faith in Jesus Christ. Neither was Paul able to
walk the dusty roads of Spain, nor see its curvaceous slopes, nor watch
its busy coast life because he died a martyr's death in Rome. [The story
of Paul's life was the tragic story of a shattered dream and a blasted hope]

Life is full of this experience. [There is hardly anyone here
this morning who has not set out for some distant Spain, some momentous
goal, some glorious realization, only to find that we had to settle for
much less. We were never able to walk as free men through the streets
of our Rome, instead we were forced to live our lives in a little con-
fining cell which circumstance had built around us. / Life seems to have
written across our lives is a fatal flaw, and history seems to have an irrational and unpredictable
streak. Ultimately we all die not having received what was promised, our
reach exceeds our grasp.

Our dreams are constantly tossed and blown by staggering winds of
disappointment.

[Mahatma Gandhi] dreamed of a united India, only to see that dream trampled over by
a bloody religious war between the Hindus and the Moslems which led to

Edited typescript of second page of the sermon "Shattered Dreams" (Chapter X, Strength to Love).
gripped Paul's life. He never got to Rome in the sense that he had hoped. He went there only as a prisoner and not as a free man. He spent his days in that ancient city in a little prison cell, held captive because of his daring faith in Jesus Christ. Neither was Paul able to walk the dusty roads of Spain, nor see its curvacious slopes, nor watch its busy coast life, because he died a martyr's death in Rome. The story of Paul's life was the tragic story of a shattered dream and a blasted hope.

Life is full of this experience. There is hardly anyone here this morning who has not set out for some distant Spain, some momentous goal, some glorious realization, only to find that we had to settle for much less. We were never able to walk as free men through the streets of our Rome. Instead we were forced to live our lives in a little confining cell which circumstance had built around us. Life seems to have a fatal flaw, and history seems to have an irrational and unpredictable streak. Ultimately we all die not having received what was promised. Our dreams are constantly tossed and blown by staggering winds of disappointment.

Mahatma Gandhi, after long years of struggle for independence, dreamed of a united India, only to see that dream trampled over by a bloody religious war between the Hindus and the Moslems which led to the division of India and Pakistan. Woodrow Wilson dreamed of a league of nations, but he died with the dream shattered. The Negro slaves of America longed for freedom with all their passionate endeavors, but many died without receiving it. Jesus, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup might pass, but he had to drink it to the last bitter dregs. The Apostle Paul prayed fervently for the "thorn" to be removed from his flesh, but he went to his grave with this desire unfulfilled. Shattered dreams! Blasted hopes! This is life.

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7 Meek, "Strength in Adversity" "Paul did get to Rome, but he went as a prisoner and not as a free man. Paul lived in Rome at the expense of the Roman government in a prison cell, held captive because of his faith. And Paul never saw the mountains and the plains and the coast life of Spain, because he died a martyr's death before the hope of his mission could ever be fulfilled.

8 Meek, "Strength in Adversity" "How many of us in one way or another have dreamed our dreams of going to Spain, of fulfilling some far reaching hope, of doing valiantly for a great cause. But we never reached the Spain of our dreams. We had to settle for a far shorter journey. We were never able to wander freely about the streets of our Rome. Instead, we looked out through the little windows of some confining cell which the circumstances of life had built around us.

9 The preceding two sentences were replaced in the published version "Like Abraham, we too sojourn in the land of promise, but so often we do not become 'heirs with him of the same promise.' Always our reach exceeds our grasp" (p. 79).

10 The Muslim state of Pakistan was founded as a provision of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. Immediately following independence, border disputes and religious conflicts erupted between India and Pakistan, killing hundreds of thousands and displacing millions. The preceding sentence was altered in the published version "After struggling for years to achieve independence, Mahatma Gandhi witnessed a bloody religious war between the Hindus and the Moslems, and the subsequent division of India and Pakistan shattered his heart's desire for a united nation" (p. 79).

11 Cf Matthew 26:39

12 Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Howard Thurman, Deep River, pp. 34-35. "Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, prayed that the cup might pass, but he had to drink it to the last bitter dregs. The Apostle Paul prayed for the 'thorn' to be taken from his flesh, but he had to carry the thorn to his grave." In the published version the phrase "he went to his grave with this desire unfulfilled" was replaced with "the pain and annoyance continued to the end of his days" (p. 79).
What does one do under such circumstances? This is a central question, for we must determine how to live in a world where our highest hopes are not fulfilled. It is quite possible for one to seek to deal with this problem by distilling all his frustrations into a core of bitterness and resentment of spirit. The persons who follow this path develop a hardness of attitude and a coldness of heart. They develop a bitter hatred for life itself. In fact, hate becomes the dominant force in their lives. They hate God, they hate the people around them, and they hate themselves. Since they can't corner God or life, they take out their vengeance on other people. If they are married, they are extremely cruel to their mate. If they have children, they treat them in the most inhuman manner. When they are not beating them, they are screaming at them, and when they are not screaming at them, they are cursing them. In short, they are mean. They love nobody and they demand no love. They trust no one and do not expect anyone to trust them. They find fault in everything and everybody. They always complain. You have seen people like this. They are cruel, vindictive and merciless.

The terrible thing about this approach is that it poisons the soul and scars the personality. It does more harm to the person who harbours it than to anyone else. Many physical ailments are touched off by bitter resentment. Medical science has revealed that many cases of arthritis, gastric ulcer and asthma are caused by the long continuance of emotional poison in the mind. They are often psychosomatic, that is to say, they show in the body, but they are caused in the mind. There can be no doubt that resentment is a harmful reaction to disappointment and capable of setting up actual physical illness.

Another possible reaction to the experience of blasted hopes is for the individu-
als to withdraw completely into themselves. They become absolute introverts. They allow no one to come into their lives and they refuse to go out to others. Such persons give up in the struggle of life. They lose the zest for living. They attempt to escape the disappointments of life by lifting their minds to a transcendent realm of cold indifference. Detachment is the word that may describe them. They are too unconcerned to love and they are too passionless to hate. They are too detached to be selfish and too lifeless to be unselfish. They are too indifferent to experience moments of joy and they are too cold to experience moments of sorrow. In short, such people are neither dead nor alive, they merely exist. Their eyes behold the beauties of nature, and yet they do not see them. Their ears are subjected to the majestic sounds of great music, and yet they do not hear it. Their hands gently touch a charming little baby, and yet they do not feel him. There is nothing of the aliveness of life left in them, there is only the dull motion of bare existence. Their disappointed hope leads them to a crippling cynicism. With Omar Khayyam they would affirm

"The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon turns to ashes—or it prospers, and anon, Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone."17

One can very easily see the danger of this reaction. It is, at bottom, based on an attempt to escape life. Psychiatrists tell us the more individuals attempt to engage in these escapes from reality the thinner and thinner their personalities become until ultimately they split. This is one of the causal sources of the schizophrenic personality.

Another way that people respond to life's disappointments is to adopt a philosophy of fatalism. This is the idea that whatever happens must happen, and that all events are determined by necessity. Fatalism implies something foreordained and inescapable. The people who subscribe to this philosophy follow a course of absolute resignation. They resign themselves to what they consider their fate. They see themselves as little more than helpless orphans thrown out in the terrifying immensities of space. Since they believe that man has no freedom, they seek neither to deliberate nor to make decisions. They wait passively for external forces to deliberate and decide for them. They never actively seek to change their circumstances, since they believe that all circumstances, like the Greek tragedies, are controlled by irresistible and foreordained forces. Often the fatalists are very religious people who see God as the determiner and controller of destiny. Everything, they feel, is God's will, however evil it happens to be. This view is expressed in the verse of one of our Christian hymns

"Though dark my path and sad my lot, Let me be still and mutter not,"

16 The repetition of the phrase "they are" in the preceding three sentences was omitted in the published version (p. 80).
17 Khayyám, Rubáiyáí, XVI
July 1962—March 1963

But breathe the prayer divinely taught,
Thy will be done.”

So the fatalists go through life with the conviction that freedom is a myth. They end up with a paralyzing determinism, saying that we are

“But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this chequer-board of Night and Days,

and that we need not trouble our minds about the future—“Who knows?” Nor about the past, for

“The Moving Finger writes, and having writ
moves on  Neither tears nor Wit can
cancel out a line of it”

For one to sink in the quicksands of this type of fatalism is both intellectually and psychologically suffocating. Since freedom is a part of the essence of man, the fatalist, in his denial of freedom, becomes a puppet and not a person. He is right in his conviction that there is no absolute freedom, and that freedom always operates within the framework of predestined structure. Thus a man is free to go north from Atlanta to Washington or South from Atlanta to Miami. But he is not free to go north to Miami or South to Washington. Freedom is always within destiny. But there is freedom. We are both free and destined. Freedom is the act of deliberating, deciding and responding within our destined nature. Even if destiny prevents our going to some attractive Spain, there still remains in us the capacity to take this disappointment, to answer it, to make our individual response to it, to stand up to it and do something with it. Fatalism doesn’t see this. It leaves the individual stymied and helplessly inadequate for life.

But even more, fatalism is based on a terrible conception of God. It sees everything that happens, evil and good alike, as the will of God. Any healthy religion will rise above the idea that God wills evil. It is true that God has to permit evil in order to preserve the freedom of man. But this does not mean that he causes it. That which is willed is intended, and the idea that God intends for a child to be born blind, or that God gives cancer to this person and inflicts insanity upon another is rank heresy. Such a false idea makes God into a devil rather than a loving Father. So fatalism is a tragic and dangerous way to deal with the problem of unfulfilled dreams.

What, then, is the answer? We must accept our unwanted and unfortunate circumstance and yet cling to a radiant hope. The answer lies in developing the capacity to accept the finite disappointment and yet cling to the infinite hope. In speak-

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18 King quotes Charlotte Elliott’s hymn, “My God and Father! While I Stray” (1834)
19 King quotes from Khayyám, Rubáiyát, LXIX and LXXI. The final line in the published version of this sermon read “nor all your Piety nor Wit/ Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, / Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it” (p. 81)
20 The phrase “as are bitterness and withdrawal” was inserted at the end of this sentence in the published version (p. 81)
ing of acceptance, I do not mean the grim, bitter acceptance of those who are fatalistic. I mean the kind of acceptance that Jeremiah achieved as expressed in the words, “this is my grief and I must bear it.”

This means sitting down and honestly confronting your shattered dream. Don’t follow the escapist method of trying “to put it out of your mind.” This will lead to repression which is always psychologically injurious. Place it at the forefront of your mind and stare daringly at it. Then ask yourself, “how can I transform this liability into an asset?” How can I, confined in some narrow Roman cell, unable to reach Rome [Spain], transform this cell from a dungeon of shame to a haven of redemptive suffering.” Almost anything that happens to us can be woven into the purposes of God. It may lengthen our cords of sympathy. It may break our self-centered pride. Even the cross, which was willed by wicked men, was wove by God into the redemption of the world.

Many of the world’s most influential characters have transformed their thorns into a crown. Charles Darwin was almost always physically ill. Robert Louis Stevenson was afflicted with tuberculosis. Helen Keller was blind and deaf. But they did not respond to these conditions with bitter resentment and grim fatalism. Rather they stood up to life, and, through the exercise of a dynamic will, transformed a negative into a positive. [George Frederic] Handel confronted the most difficult and trying circumstances in his life. Says his biographer “His health and his fortunes had reached the lowest ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and his money was all gone. His creditors seized him and threatened him with imprisonment. For a brief time he was tempted to give up the fight—but then he rebounded again to compose the greatest of his inspirations, the epic “Messiah.” So, the “Hallelujah Chorus” was born, not in a desired Spain, but in a narrow cell of undesirable circumstances.

Wanting Spain and getting a narrow cell in a Roman prison, how familiar an experience that is! But to take the Roman prison, the broken, the left-over of a disappointed expectation, and make of it an opportunity to serve God’s purpose, how much less familiar that is! Yet, powerful living has always involved such a victory over one’s own soul and one’s situation.

We as a people have long dreamed of freedom, but we are still confined to an oppressive prison of segregation and discrimination. Must we respond to this disappointed hope with bitterness and cynicism? Certainly not, for this will only distort and

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21 Cf Jeremiah 10:19
22 Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, p 6 “Charles Darwin, as he himself said, ‘almost continually unwell’, Robert Louis Stevenson, with his tuberculosis, Helen Keller, blind and deaf.”
23 The preceding six sentences were condensed in the published version “Many of the world’s most influential personalities have exchanged their thorns for crowns. Charles Darwin, suffering from a recurrent physical illness, Robert Louis Stevenson, plagued with tuberculosis, and Helen Keller, afflicted with blindness and deafness, responded not with bitterness or fatalism, but rather by the exercise of a dynamic will transformed negative circumstances into positive assets” (p 82)
24 The preceding two sentences were condensed in the published version “How familiar is the experience of longing for Spain and settling for a Roman prison, and how less familiar the transforming of the broken remains of a disappointed expectation into opportunities to serve God’s purpose!” (p 83)
25 The word “Negroes” replaced “as a people” in the published version (p 83)
poison our personality. Must we conclude that the existence of segregation is a part of the will of God, and thereby resign ourselves to the fate of oppression. Of course not, for such a course would be blasphemy, because it attributes to God something that should be attributed to the devil. Moreover, to accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, thereby the oppressed become as evil as the oppressor. Our most fruitful course of action will be to stand up with a courageous determination, moving on non-violently amid obstacles and setbacks, facing disappointments and yet clinging to the hope. It will be this determination and final refusal to be stopped that will eventually open the door of fulfillment. While still in the prison of segregation we must ask, "How can I turn this liability into an asset?" It is possible that, recognizing the necessity of suffering, we can make of it a virtue. To suffer in a righteous cause is to grow to our humanity's full stature. If only to save ourselves from bitterness, we need the vision to see the ordeals of this generation as the opportunity to transform ourselves and American society. Moreover, through our suffering in this oppressive prison and our non-violent struggle to get out of it, we may give the kind of spiritual dynamic to western civilization that it so desperately needs to survive.

Of course some of us will die having not received the promise of freedom. But we must continue to move on. On the one hand we must accept the finite disappointment, but in spite of this we must maintain the infinite hope. This is the only way that we will be able to live without the fatigue of bitterness and the drain of resentment.

This was the secret of the survival of our slave foreparents. Slavery was a low, dirty, inhuman business. When the slaves were taken from Africa, they were cut off from their family ties, and chained to ships like beasts. There is nothing more tragic than to cut a person off from his family, his language, and his roots. In many instances, during the days of slavery, husbands were cut off from wives and children were separated from parents. The women were often forced to satisfy the biological urges of the master himself, and the slave husband was powerless to intervene. Yet, in spite of these inexpressible cruelties, our foreparents continued to live and develop. Even though they could expect nothing the next morning but the long rows of cotton, the scorching heat and the rawhide whip of the overseer, they continued to dream of a better day. They accepted the fact of slavery and yet clung to the hope of freedom. Their hope continued even amid a seemingly hopeless situation.

26 The preceding two sentences were condensed in the published version "By recognizing the necessity of suffering in a righteous cause, we may possibly achieve our humanity's full stature" (p. 83).

27 Thurman, *Deep River*, p. 35. "But it must be intimately remembered that slavery was a dirty, sordid, inhuman business. When the slaves were taken from their homeland, the primary social unit was destroyed, and all immediate tribal and family ties were ruthlessly broken. There is no more hapless victim than one who is cut off from family, from language, from one's roots."

28 Thurman, *Deep River*, p. 36. "In instance after instance, husbands were sold from wives, children were separated from parents, a complete and whirling attack was made on the sanctity of the home and the family. Added to all this, the slave women were constantly at the mercy of the lust and rapacity of the master himself, while the slave husband or father was powerless to intervene."

29 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 scorching heat, the riding overseer with his rawhide whip, the auction block where families were torn asunder, the barking of the bloodhounds."

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took the pessimism of life and filtered it in their own souls and fashioned it into a creative optimism that gave them strength to carry on. With their bottomless vitality they continually transformed the darkness of frustration into the light of hope. They had the “courage to be.”

When I first flew from New York to London, it was in the days of the propeller type aircraft. The flight took 9½ hours. On returning to the States from London I discovered that the flying time would be twelve hours and a half. This confused me for the moment. I knew that the distance returning to New York was the same as the distance from New York to London. Why this difference of three hours, I asked myself. Soon the pilot walked through the plane to greet the passengers. As soon as he got to me I raised the question of the difference in flight time. His answer was simple and to the point. “You must understand something about the winds,” he said. “When we leave New York,” he continued, “the winds are in our favor, we have a strong tail wind. When we return to New York from London, the winds are against us, we have a strong head wind.” And then he said, “don’t worry though, these four engines are fully capable of battling the winds, and even though it takes three hours longer we will get to New York.” Well, life is like this. There are times when the winds are in our favor—moments of joy, moments of great triumph, moments of fulfillment. But there are times when the winds are against us, times when strong head winds of disappointment and sorrow beat unrelentingly upon our lives. We must decide whether we will allow the winds to overwhelm us or whether we will journey across life’s mighty Atlantic with our inner spiritual engines equipped to go in spite of the winds. This refusal to be stopped, this “courage to be,” this determination to go on living “in spite of,” is the God in man. He who has made this discovery knows that no burden can overwhelm him and no wind of adversity can blow his hope away. He can stand anything that can happen to him.

Certainly the Apostle Paul had this type of “courage to be.” His life was a continual round of disappointments. He started out for Spain and ended up in a Roman prison. He wanted to go to Bithynia but ended up in Troas. Everywhere he turned he faced broken plans. He was jailed, mobbed, beaten and shipwrecked in his gallant program of spreading the gospel of Christ. But he did not allow these conditions to overwhelm him. “I have learned,” he said, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Paul did not mean that he had learned to be

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30 King invokes the title to Paul Tillich’s book *The Courage to Be*
31 The preceding three sentences were altered in the published version. “At times in our lives the tail winds of joy, triumph, and fulfillment favor us, and at times the head winds of disappointment, sorrow, and tragedy beat unrelentingly against us” (p. 84)
32 Cf Acts 16:7–9
33 In the published version, the preceding five sentences were altered. “On every side were broken plans and shattered dreams. Planning to visit Spain, he was consigned to a Roman prison. Hoping to go to Bithynia, he was sidetracked to Troas. His gallant mission for Christ was measured in sufferings, often in peril of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” Did he permit these conditions to master him?” (pp. 84–85)
34 Philippians 4:11
King writes an outline about dreams that do not come true next to a chapter titled “Shattered Dreams” in his copy of Hamilton’s 1954 book *Horns and Halos in Human Nature* (pp. 24–25).
complacent. There is nothing in the life of Paul which could characterize him as a complacent man. [Edward] Gibbon in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire says, “Paul has done more to promote the idea of freedom and liberty than any man who set foot on western soil.” This does not sound like a complacent man. So Paul is not saying that he had learned to dwell in a valley of stagnant complacency. Neither is he saying that he had learned to resign himself to some tragic fate. Paul meant that he had learned to stand up amid the disappointment of life without despairing. He had discovered the disjunction between a tranquil soul and the outward accidents of circumstance. He had learned to live from within instead of from without. 35

The person who makes this magnificent discovery will, like Paul, be the recipient of true peace. Indeed, he will possess that peace which passeth all understanding. 36 The peace which the world understands is that which comes with the removal of the burden or the pain. It is a peace which only comes on beautiful summer days, when the skies are clear and the sun shines in all of its scintillating beauty. It is a peace that comes when the pocketbook is filled and the body has no aches or pains. It is a peace that can only come by reaching the Span of one’s hope and staying out of the filthy jail. But this is not true peace. Real peace is something inward, a tranquility of soul amid terrors of trouble. It is inner calm amid the howl and rage of outer storm. True peace is like a hurricane. Around its circumference rages howling and jostling winds of destruction, while at its center all is serenely quiet. This is why true peace passeth all understanding. It is easy to understand how one can have peace when everything is going right, and one is “up and in.” But it is difficult to understand how one can have unruffled tranquility when he is “down and out,” when the burden still lies heavy upon one’s shoulders, when the pain still throbs annoyingly in one’s body, when the prison cell still surrounds one with unbearable agony, and when the disappointment is inescapably real. True peace is peace amid story, tranquility amid disaster. It is a calm that exceeds all description and all explanation. 37

Peace was Jesus’ chief legacy. He said, “peace I leave with you, my peace I give

35 The previous six sentences were altered in the published version. “Does this sound like complacency? Nor did he learn resignation to inscrutable fate. By discovering the disjunction between spiritual tranquility and the outward accidents of circumstance, Paul learned to stand tall and without despairing amid the disappointments of life.” (p. 85)

36 Cf. Philippians 4:7

37 The preceding paragraph was altered in the published version. “Each of us who makes this magnificent discovery will, like Paul, be a recipient of that true peace which passeth all understanding. Peace as the world commonly understands it comes when the summer sky is clear and the sun shines in scintillating beauty, when the pocketbook is full, when the mind and body are free of ache and pain, and when the shores of Spain have been reached. But this is not true peace. The peace of which Paul spoke is a calmness of soul amid terrors of trouble, inner tranquility amid the howl and rage of outer storm, the serene quiet at the center of a hurricane amid the howling and jostling winds. We readily understand the meaning of peace when everything is going right and when one is ‘up and in,’ but we are baffled when Paul speaks of that true peace which comes when a man is ‘down and out,’ when burdens lie heavy upon his shoulders, when pain throbs annoyingly in his body, when he is confined by the stone walls of a prison cell, and when disappointment is inescapably real. True peace, a calm that exceeds all description and all explanation, is peace amid storm and tranquility amid disaster.” (p. 85)
This peace is there for us to inherit if we will only accept it through faith. Paul at Philippi, body beaten and bloody, incarcerated in a dark and desolate dungeon, feet chained and spirit tired, could joyously sing the songs of Zion at midnight. The early Christians, with the fierce faces of hungry lions standing before them and the excruciating pain of the chopping block only a step away, could face these pending disasters rejoicing that they had been deemed worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of Christ. The Negro slaves, standing terrified in the sizzling heat with the whip lashes freshly etched on their backs could sing triumphantly, "By and by I'm gwan to lay down this heavy load." This was peace amid storm.

In the final analysis our ability to deal creatively with shattered dreams and blasted hopes will be determined by the extent of our faith in God. A genuine faith will imbue us with the conviction that there is a God beyond time and a Life beyond Life. Thus we know that we are not alone in any circumstance, however dismal and catastrophic it may be. God dwells with us in life's confining and oppressive cells. And even if we die there having not received the earthly promise, he will walk with us down that mysterious road called death, and lead us at last to that indescribable city that he has prepared for us. Let us never feel that God's creative power is exhausted by this earthly life, and his majestic love is locked within the limited walls of time and space. This would be a strongly irrational universe if God did not bring about an ultimate wedding of virtue and fulfillment. This would be an absurdly meaningless universe if death turned out to be a blind alley leading the human race into a state of nothingness. God, through Christ has taken the sting from death, and it no longer has dominion over us. This earthly life is merely an embryonic prelude to a new awakening, and death is an open door that leads us into life eternal.

With this faith we can accept nobly what cannot be changed, and face disappointments and sorrow with an inner poise. We will have the power to absorb the most excruciating pain without losing our sense of hope. We will then know that in life and death, God will take care of us.

"Be not dismayed, what-ere betide,
God will take care of you
Beneath his wings of live abide,
God will take care of you "

"Thro' days of toil when heart doth fail,
God will take care of you
When dangers fierce your path assail,
God will take care of you "
"God will take care of you, through every day,
"O're all the way.
He will take care of you,
God will take care of you "44

{But helpless pieces of the game he plays upon this chequer Board of Nights and
days.}45

TAHDd MLKP-MBU Box 119A.

44 King quotes Cwilla D Martin's hymn "God Will Take Care of You" (1904)
45 Khayyám, Rubáiyát, LXIX

Draft of Chapter XIII, “Our God Is Able”

[July 1962–March 1963]
[Atlanta, Ga]

King reminds his readers that "God is able to subdue all the powers of evil" and that "evil does not have the final word." As examples of this, King discusses the disintegration of colonialism in Africa and Asia and the slow but sure decline of legal segregation in this country, noting that they "represent the passing of a system that was born in injustice, nurtured in inequality and raised in exploitation." He recounts a transformative experience from the bus boycott during a night when, he admits, "I was ready to give up." As King prayed for guidance, he heard "the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth, and God will be at your side forever.'" King preached a version of this sermon during the early days of the Montgomery bus boycott.1

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling " Jude 1 24

At the center of the Christian faith is the conviction that there is a God of Power in the universe who is able to do exceedingly abundant things in nature and history. This conviction is stressed over and over again in the Old and New testaments.2 Theologically, it is expressed in the doctrine of the omnipotence of God. The God that we worship is not a weak and incompetent God.3 He is able to beat back gigan-

1 King, "Our God Is Able," 1 January 1956, pp 243–246 in this volume
2 Meek, “Our God Is Able, A sermon preached in the Old South Church in Boston," 4 January 1953
"Meanwhile ‘Our God is able’ is a conviction stressed and exulted in, over and over and over in the New Testament"
3 Meek, “Our God Is Able” "Believe me, it is not a weak God, it is not an incompetent God with Whom we have to deal."