



Jack L. Willcuts

Jack L. Willcuts (1922-1989) served the Friends church with energy, vision, and persistence. His ministry includes twenty-six years as a pastor in five different Friends churches in the Northwest, eight years as a missionary in Bolivia, and twelve years as general superintendent of Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, from 1966-1971 and again from 1979-1987. He was editor of *Evangelical Friend* magazine from 1967-1985.

At the time of his death, he was serving as pastor to senior citizens at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon.

Jack is also the author of the much-loved book, *Why Friends Are Friends*, which examines the Quaker past and connects it with the present and the challenges of the future.

This week of devotions are adapted from Jack's writing in *Evangelical Friend* from 1971-1974.

BIBLE READING: James 1:2–4, 13–15

Temptation, real temptation, seems always to come as an exasperating surprise. It has appeal or it wouldn't be temptation. It is also terrible if it leads us away from God—but that is temptation. Temptation is inevitable; to overlook this is one of the greatest temptations of all!

Temptation might be considered a road sign along the Christian walk, indicating we are on the right way. Too many assume that the victorious life lifts one above temptation. It does not. It lifts one above defeat. If I give directions on how to reach my house, I might say, "You will come to a dangerous, busy intersection. Cross this and turn left at the second light." I could tell them to avoid this intersection and go another direction, but they would then not be on the road to the destination they had selected. Along the road to heaven and Christian victorious living, there are dangerous experiences to be passed, but we learn from James that these are inevitable.

Recalling the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, the three basic trials, the enemy brought great pressure on physical weakness (hunger), the desire for success, and the improper use of power. These have a contemporary sound. It is easy enough for Christians to rationalize the use of any method at hand, especially the accepted and refined techniques of the world, to accomplish goals that appear worthy. But it is terribly important to use only the Lord's ways of reaching even Christian goals.

SONG: The Solid Rock

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we know that you experienced temptation; help us become stronger through the temptations we face. Give us the wisdom to recognize them and the courage to endure.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, October 1972

BIBLE READING: *Isaiah 58:6–12*

In his review of 1973, Norman Rohrer, editor at the Evangelical Press remarked that “Philosopher Will Herberg in 1973 observed that the masses want the Gospel, not social issue.” By masses, it is assumed reference is made to the church in America.

This may be true, but if Herberg is correct, does this still make the “masses” right? The swinging pendulum of church interests and wants may not be the best criteria for measuring the Lord’s leading. On each occasion in history when the church was called back or renewed, it has come from a focus upon some neglected truth of the gospel, and usually those who did the focusing were suspect, even persecuted. Reform and renewal usually start with a few voices in the wilderness.

The danger in this statement, of course, is the implication that there is a choice, as though a Christian must be either spiritual and evangelical *or* have social concerns. The Lord demonstrates both at once in balance.

Of course, many evangelical Christians are deeply burdened by situations [of social injustice], with great efforts made to effect change, but the fact remains that the masses in America still seem to want a gospel that either ignores or avoids any comprehension of involvement with the issues that must be resolved for conscience sake. *The gospel without social issues is a mockery; social issues without the gospel are hopeless.*

SONG: *If We Are the Body (Casting Crowns)*

PRAYER SUGGESTION: *We need your heart, O God, for the spiritual health of the church, both in personal holiness and in care for others. We pray for wisdom from above to guide us every day.*

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, January 1974

BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 3:10–17

Sometimes we find that crisis, not calm, is in control. How do followers of Jesus Christ respond to this? We think not only of newspaper stories, but of those whose bank books are bad news; of those whose homes seem to be tearing apart with misunderstandings, tensions, and fear; of loneliness, weariness, uncertainty; of illness—our own or of someone we love.

Life is hard for many. Which then is really normal—calm or crisis? If peace and calm are possible, then why not now, completely? A quiet life and existence appears to be the ideal. This really may be our mistake.

Struggle is the norm, even though to many it is a sure sign that all is not well. Jesus makes it clear in the beatitudes: we find happiness from being hungry and thirsty, while peace comes to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. One can look at it from this standpoint: it is a great pleasure to eat a good meal when you are hungry but not much fun when you aren't hungry. Appetite is created by putting forth effort and hard work.

Peace is a by-product. Calmness is a result. Neither are to be goals. This is God's way, and it is also our way. If we want to be calm, we won't find it by looking for it. This should be remembered by those who believe calmness comes in not getting involved with the problems of other people, withdrawing, and playing it safe. Staying away from responsibilities and schedules—this isn't what the gospel teaches. "For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross."

SONG: O Christ, the Healer

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, you know that we dislike conflict and crisis and hard work. Help us to keep the joy of life with you in our vision so that we may endure.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, January 1974

BIBLE READING: Psalm 46

In our concern for the problems of life, which are blown up fantastically in the news media, people can become worn out by feelings of worry, fear, and guilt to the point where they are actually rendered incapable of acting constructively. Any grade school science student knows that when a common housefly is magnified, it looks like such a grotesque monster even the bravest would cringe in terror if they were to meet one. Life is under a microscope. Every problem is plopped right down in your lap in your own living room. Cameras play for the most spectacular angle, reporters press for the most far-out or controversial situation, and anyone who is able to cope rationally and constructively has to perform a minor miracle. But refusing to watch, to read, or to think is hardly the honest way to react.

Dr. Paul Tournier wrote a fine little book titled *Fatigue in Modern Society*, in which he insists we too often are worn out with the wrong feelings. Constructive action is blunted by feelings of self-pity and worry. Reflective meditation before God, he says, is the greatest agent in reducing the fatigue that saps creative energies.

When we are tired and frustrated, we often either retire in defeat or step up our activities—full of frustration rather than creative energy. “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10), says the Lord. How tremendously helpful those old words are today!

SONG: You Are My Hiding Place

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God of creation, when life seems overwhelming and frightening, help me find my center in you.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, December 1971

BIBLE READING: Luke 6:27–42

The mission of the church is to be redemptive. When this criteria governs church attitudes, action, and objectives, it changes the focus on much that is attempted.

Consider some examples. A fifteen-year-old is discovered to be experimenting with drugs and is isolated from other youth. Is this redemptive? Cannot the fellowship of Christians surround such persons and their parents with a compassionate, loving, prayerful support that will be redemptive rather than judgmental? A Friends pastor deliberately sets out to get his realtor's license in order to help minorities be sure of an opportunity for fair housing. A local meeting brings a carry-in meal every Sunday evening to the church to be shared with students from a secular college close by. Aren't these redemptive choices?

G. K. Chesterton observed that the only way to make a good statue is to throw away good marble. Some of the "good marble" that represents the energies and time invested in church work will have to be thrown away before the image of new Christians appears out of the rubble. Patience, love, understanding, prayer, gentleness, and compassion are the weaponry of the kingdom.

So many within and around our congregations are hungry for help and compassion. To "bear...one another's burdens" is the great opportunity before us today. There are some problems just too big to carry alone. The caring congregation has no limitations.

SONG: The Servant Song

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Loving Father, make us instruments of redemptive grace and kindness to our world.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, May 1972

BIBLE READING: Revelation 7:15–17

The airstrip at the tiny airport near Belize City in Belize, was overcast and dark, with murky, rain-filled clouds. As we boarded the plane to continue our flight, we were tempted to question the wisdom of the pilot who headed the DC7 into the ominous sky. In a few minutes, however, there was a shaft of sunlight, and we suddenly burst into clear blue, dazzling brilliance above the cushion of weeping clouds. The rain and stormy waves of the Caribbean far beneath were quickly forgotten.

In these murky days, it is nice to know Revelation 7:15–17:

Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him....‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

Perhaps some of these promises mean less to those who still have more food choices compared to the majority of the world’s population who are always hungry. But every meeting and Sunday school class includes someone who is experiencing sorrow. And for those who struggle with baffling language barriers, no joy will be greater than to be around the throne of God, speaking the language of heaven.

The comfort of hope is matched only by the hope of comfort. Surely no test is too severe to suffer for the hope that is set before us in the coming of Christ.

SONG: How Bright These Glorious Spirits Shine

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for your promise, God, to take care of our needs. Help us to do the same for others—offering food to the hungry and comfort for those who suffer.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, October 1973

BIBLE READING: Luke 11:1–13

Long ago, God gave us his most extravagant gift in Christ. God's latest gift, the Holy Spirit, is just as wonderful and immediately contemporary, the greatest gift that God can give. When he gives the Spirit, he gives himself.

One way of measuring human maturity is by the requests we make known to our fathers. As small children we asked: "Can I have a nickel, Daddy?" As we grew older, we asked for toys, books, a bicycle—always *things*. We grew older still and began to ask for counsel and advice.

Have we progressed as far spiritually? Instead of asking for the Holy Spirit, we too often make trivial requests. When we receive the Spirit, all the most precious things of earth and heaven are ours.

There is an old story of a beggar who sought an audience with Alexander the Great, who had made the boast that any of his subjects could approach him at any time. When the beggar appeared, he seemed to onlookers to be impertinent. Without apology he forthrightly asked for a farm for himself, a dowry for his daughter, and an education for his son. To the surprise of the court, Alexander gave him all three, saying, "Oh, I get weary of these people who come in asking me for a gold piece. That saucy beggar treated me like a king. He asked big."

Ask big! Ask for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's greatest gift!

SONG: Spirit of the Living God

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Loving Father, we want your Spirit as fully as we are able to receive, every moment of every day! Because of Jesus, we are bold enough to ask, knowing that it is your desire to pour yourself into us through your Spirit.

—Jack L. Willcuts, *Evangelical Friend*, October 1973