

There Are Experiences; There's Life. They Have Nothing In Common

A talk by Vernon Howard given on 07-07-84

Let me tell you your life's story, which is no life at all as yet. Let's say you were six years old, and you were out playing in the front yard on the sidewalk, and you were chasing a ball, and you ran into an obstacle and fell down and hurt yourself and started crying. And a neighbor happened to come along and see and heard you crying there and hurt a little bit – skinned knee. And he – this man, neighbor, came over and took you by the shoulder and kind of gently led you up the steps to where your mother was. And she came out and thanked the man, and you went in and your tears stopped for a while.

A week later you were having dinner around the family table, and your father remarked to your mother about this neighbor. And what you heard as you were half eating with half interest there at the table – what you heard out of the corner of your ear, because you were thinking about playing, you heard your father tell your mother that this man who had brought you to the door had just been arrested for being in a big fight down at the bar in which he had severely injured, pummeled, another man. So the man who helped you is now under arrest. And you understood what that meant. That the police took him away – in handcuffs. That experience became a part of your experience.

You're now fifteen years old, and one day you and a gang of other boys were down at the lake. Seven, eight of you. And they suddenly dare you, after being there for a while and splashing around and having fun, all of a sudden they dare you to swim out to that raft out in the middle of the lake. And how many of you have ever been fifteen? All right. When someone challenges you and says, "You can't do that," you immediately say, "Oh, yes, I can." Right? No intelligence at all. Just the stupid reaction, "Yes, I can."

So you say, "Yes, I can swim out to that raft and back." And they nag you and say, "No, you can't." And you say, "Yes, I can." And they say, "Prove it." Ah, now you're in trouble, huh? You didn't know – nobody knows at fifteen – what their vanity and boasting gets them into. What this need is to protect your picture of yourself as being a succeder. We don't realize where the lies about ourselves lead us. Some people never learn when they're a lot older than that. Most people don't learn. Anyway, you say, "I'll prove it. Sure, I can swim out to the raft and back."

And so they kind of stand as one group together. They're kind of in a conspiracy against you, but you don't know that. And so you go down – worried, huh? whether you're going to make it or not? That raft is out there quite a ways, and you're not the world's greatest swimmer. No Johnny Weissmuller. So you start out and, oh, what conflict. You don't want to go,

but now you have to go. Right? The old slave driver of having bragged about being able to do it, now you can't break that word. Because you think your "I" is invested in it. So you – with great fear and trembling, you go out and you start swimming out there.

Oh, what an ordeal that was for you to swim out to that raft. And you feel that you're not going to make it several times. You're not a good swimmer at all. You lose your breath, and you even – two or three times you feel the water come above your head once or twice, but you manage to come up, and you manage to get out there. And you climb up on the raft.

And now for your sweet-sour experience which you anticipate as you climb up on the raft – to turn around and give them a big smiling wave, right? And you do that, and you get up there and turn towards shore to give the big victorious wave, and they're gone. They've deserted you. They took off. They played a trick on you. Now it's even worse than before. How are you going to get back? At least when they were there, there's some hope someone might come out and help you, but now there isn't. You stay there for a half hour. And you sit down and worry about it. Sit down on the edge of the raft and worry about it, hoping they might come back. It's getting dark. You know they're not going to come back. You finally force yourself back into the water and manage by some way to get on back to shore. Oh, what an experience, huh?

And here's the worst part of it. Because when you're fifteen, you don't know very much. You had all bitterness and anger at yourself and at them for putting you through that ordeal. And the next day when you see them at school, you wave at them as if you're still friends with them. The fakery has set in, hasn't it? And the – oh, yes, and the self-hatred of your own weakness is there. When we're weak, we sense it, don't we? All right. That was an experience. Now, I'm leading up to an extremely vital point for you. That experience goes into your memory box.

You're now twenty-two, and you meet that nice girl. You've been eyeing her at a distance and wondering how you're ever going to get to talk to her. And she's given you a couple glances. But you manage to talk to her, and you get acquainted, and you get to liking each other a little bit. And you make such great plans for the future. And then, after a few romantic evenings – you don't know what happened – nobody ever knows what happens to them. All they know – the event happened, but there's no comprehension of the why and how in back of it. It just faded out. You just saw less and less of each other. No big quarrels even; it just faded out. She went one way and you went another way. And that went into your memory box of experiences.

Now, I've given you these examples, and you can find hundreds of your own, can you not? Here is the almighty point for you to seize upon which is experience is not life. Your accumulated experiences of hearing your father tell you about the man who was arrested – and you didn't quite know what to do with it and so you didn't do anything with it – the experience of those boys tricking you and then you going back and smiling at them and the awful fear of being out in that water all alone, all that went into experience. And then with the girl a little bit later, all these added up. In your

misconception, you call them your life. You didn't understand the wrong turn you made after each one of these – not just three but hundreds of various events and experiences.

Unknown to you, you did go in the wrong internal direction so that they became hardened. And from that point on, unknown to yourself, twenty-four hours a day you referred to all these sad, sometimes happy, sometimes confusing experiences – you referred to them as your life – as things, events, sadnesses and gladnesses – you referred to them as things that happened to you.

Wrong. Nothing happened to your real life, but you don't know the difference between accumulated experiences and true life. Therefore, you couldn't distinguish clearly and understand what was happening to you. So you made the mistake, which everyone makes, of referring to all past events, referring to them as your experiences, your events, your life, as things that happen to you! All right.

Nothing ever happened to you! What happened is that you heard your parents discussing the man who was arrested, you went through the experience of being out in that deep water, you had the experience of meeting the girl, and that is all that happened. There was no you-formation at all. The world should hear this talk. I want you to hear it and understand it so you can begin to melt down the hardened block of ice that you now think is you because you made the error of thinking that an experience is a self. It is not. An experience is just an experience, in time. There is feeling, and there's reactions, and there are hatreds, and there are what you call loves, but they are not an accumulation of a real self.

To see this is bad news for your old nature but terrifically marvelous news for the emerging light-self because you can now see what it means to allow yourself to be melted down every minute by taking all present experiences as right. And when you do that, the knowledge and insight of taking a present experience right – that is, without you – that will be the light that shines on the three experiences at home, in the lake, and with the girl, and they will indeed melt so that there is no longer an entity connected with the experiences. Because you understand that something happened, but nothing happened to you because there was no you there, no real you there, to accumulate. All accumulations of experience which you take as being exciting or sad or whatever – all experiences are simply a passing event. Something that arises – you know about it, and you can remember about it, and it fades away. And everyone – everyone makes the mistake of adding an "I" to experience, and there is your sorrow, there is your lack of intelligence, there is the intense confusion of always asking, "What should I do with this event?"

Never ask, "What should I do with this present event or experience?" You don't have to. If there was no inquirer there, no desperate seeker there, asking, "What should I do about this financial condition? What should I do about this news I heard that threatens my respectability?" If there was no inquirer, asker, there, there would be no problem. But you made the mistake when you were five, fifteen and twenty-two, and you're continuing it, and

you ask, "What should I do?" which means you'll never know what to do because the whole thing is a batch, a sack, a sack full of illusion. Nothing real is happening.

Now, this is what it means to give away your old life, to let it fade away, to no longer increase it, add to it, no longer accumulate. When you know that you are not who you think about, talk about, worry about – when you know that, then you're living in the present, free moment. And that present, free moment, that free nature that you have, has no need for accumulation, no need to connect with events and get a thrill from it or a pain from it. It has no need for that because it's complete in itself.

It is the accumulated self which is built out of your experiences that has always puzzled, always worried as to what to do. If by a great astounding miracle you were all to wake up right now and drop the block of ice, drop past delusions about experiences being your life, if you were able to drop that right now, you could then go out of this door and nothing will dismay you.

You don't know the boldness that you'll have. You don't know the – oh, listen to this phrase. Write it down. Casual courage. Casual courage. You don't have to think about it. There's no past. You never have to ask, "What should I do next?" You never have to ask, "What did I do in the past so I can use that as a reference for doing now." That's the last thing you want to do is to ask yourself what to do because you did something in the past. You know how you have betrayed yourself by looking back to the past experiences and saying, "Well, I'd better do what I did before."

See, there is no repetition in nowness. There is no false memory in living in your true nature which is not an accumulation but which is a free, independent, very courageous and very confident new identity. There are experiences; there's Life with a capital L. They have nothing in common. You create the experiences; God has already created Life. You get rid of your experiences that gives you an identity, and God will give you the true identity of Life. Do not try to know who you are by thinking about it in any way at all. You will never know who you really are if you accept the foolish, treacherous substitute of a thought-self.

All right. Now, there is a weakness in all human beings which you recognize somewhat, a little bit, which is the weakness of always excusing your behavior. Always excusing your behavior, and always associating with other people who will also excuse you, which is like a pack of wolves getting together to excuse each other for attacking the farmer's chicken pen.

Negative emotions such as self-excuse run in packs. And this is why you see nothing but this wolf-like behavior out in the world where everyone is an attacker. All lost people are attackers. And you – you have determined not to be lost, so you now must also determine that you're never going to – you're never going to excuse anything wrong that you're able to detect in yourself. You're going to grow up. Oh, it's going to – it's going to shame you, yes. It's going to embarrass you.

What have I been telling you the last twenty minutes about? Whenever you

see a weakness in you and want the tendency to excuse it instead of facing it, aren't you referring to the past? Aren't you – aren't you still worshipping that idol called "me"? Aren't you protecting something? Aren't you protecting – aren't you protecting the source of your self-torment? Yes.

If you avoid the pain, you will continue the pain. If you go through the pain, never escaping, never excusing – if you will go through it – which means staying with it until something cracks – until something happens – a positive crack. Going through the pain means that you understand that you are not even your own weakness.

See, we have to use words to explain the best we can, so if I say you're weak, that's okay. That's fine. You have to do that. But you know what you do? I'm telling you, you don't know what you do. You glorify your weakness. You excuse your weakness. There is no excuse for being weak because cosmic confidence is available. Right now! The detective has to enter the picture. And let's see if we can track it down a little bit.

Wanting – wanting another person to be your strength is a weak excuse. Wanting your own thoughts about your past life to be a source of guidance is cowardice. Wanting any kind of a hero at all, wanting anything outside of yourself, is a sign of weakness and a sign that you are eager to find excuses for yourself. Excuses for not doing the true work.

Now, I have given you something that you can do. And I'll tell you in the couple minutes we have left how to encourage yourself. Right encouragement to not excuse yourself for the work that you have to do. For example, setting the block of ice called you out into the warm sun to where Truth can melt it down. Every time you get melted down, a little bit of the hardness and bitterness and worry falls away. There is really nothing to worry about. There is really nothing to worry about. But you want something to worry about so that there will be *someone* to worry about. There's no person there at all. You're worrying about a delusion. You're worrying about someone who doesn't exist. See that. All right.

Do you know what it means the last straw? The last straw. All right. You know the story. The farmer – the farmer is bringing his load of straw to town. And he had a lot of straw but only one horse. So he put all the straw on. But he wanted to be very efficient. So he said, "Well, maybe one more straw. And the horse can carry that, and I'll get more to market and make more money." Then he said, "One more straw, one more straw, one more straw," until finally the horse collapsed, right? The last straw the horse collapsed and refused to go along with it anymore.

Have you reached the last straw yet? The last straw of your piling all this junk on your own back? Why don't you collapse and refuse to go along. I tell you, part of your definite spiritual experience will be several last straws. Maybe hundreds of them for that matter. Where all of a sudden you knew you were not going to repeat anymore, you were never going to be weak again toward that person that you fawned before, where something in you – the last straw consciousness came to you, and you knew absolutely – you knew in your heart that you had made an enormous advancement. That you

are not going to be weak toward that person anymore. When that other person made a sarcastic, critical remark to you, you knew you weren't going to smile weakly back anymore and take it.

Stop taking it! Don't take it! That – sir, that relative is the last straw. The divine fierceness will shine through your eyes, will sound in your voice, will express itself in your now-nature, and they won't dare treat you that way anymore. And you have no hostility toward them. You have found something better than the hostility which you've been using all these years. What you've found, by no longer excusing yourself – what you've found is that you don't have to take it anymore because God says so, and that is who you're listening to from now on.