

# Victorious Living

E. STANLEY JONES



**THE ABINGDON PRESS**

**NEW YORK**

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**BOOKS BY E. STANLEY JONES**

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**VICTORIOUS LIVING**

**CHRIST'S ALTERNATIVE TO COMMUNISM**

**CHRIST AND HUMAN SUFFERING**

**THE CHRIST OF THE MOUNT**

**THE CHRIST OF EVERY ROAD**

**CHRIST AT THE ROUND TABLE**

**THE CHRIST OF THE INDIAN ROAD**

## INTRODUCTION

THREE years ago the Inner Urge came to me to write on Victorious Living. The Voice seemed to sum up what through years of dealing with inquirers has become to me a pressing fact, namely, that the most urgent necessity in human living is to be able to face life victoriously. For many—the number is appalling—are living morally and spiritually defeated. They are inwardly beaten, hence outwardly ineffective. They do not know how to live and to live victoriously. They lack resources. This book is addressed to that need.

I have tried to combine the individual and the social emphases in a living blend, with a devotional spirit running through all. The socially-minded must be patient if I seem in the beginning to stress overmuch the personal emphasis. I think we should begin just there. But we must not end there. The end is the sum total of human relationships.

In the structure of the book I have tried to meet three needs: (1) A book of daily devotions for personal, group, and family devotions. Instead of making it, as usual in devotional books, a book of scattered thoughts, changing from day to day, I have woven the devotions around one theme, VICTORIOUS LIVING. (2) I have gathered these daily studies into groups of seven, so that the book can be used as a weekly study book by classes of various kinds. (3) I have tried to put the subject matter into such a continuous whole that it may be read through as an ordinary book.

I have begun at the lowest rung of the ladder, and have tried to go step by step to the full implications of victorious living. Mature souls must be patient with the first steps, remembering that many are not able to live a victorious life because they do not know how to link up with God's power. I have tried to make the first steps very clear. In doing so I have endeavored to answer this letter: "I am an average young American mother. I have two very small children. I have read your last book, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*. It is great, soul-stirring, ringing with truth, but it leaves me with a terrific thirst—how do you get it? You advised a bored young woman to "Try Christ, and I give you my word of honor that it will

## INTRODUCTION

work to the degree you work it.' But how? Where to start? Then again in chapter eleven: "Today so far as I am concerned this program begins"—and, still, how? How to achieve a life evidencing the peace that passes understanding, even in myself, let alone passing it on? How does the kingdom of God start within my unruly, discontented, selfish, ungrateful, impatient, and sullen self, before I can begin to spread it? Your books (I have read several) paint a glorious picture of living life—but you forgot to tell us what brushes and colors to use, and how. I believe there must be thousands like me. Won't you write a book about 'Christ and the Kingdom Within'?"

I am sure that the writer of this letter represents many, and I have written for them as well as for the mature Christian. I mentioned in my last book that I had received a request signed by many prominent Christians of America asking me to write a book on the "Inner Life." I trust that this book fulfills that request—a request which I deeply appreciated. But, as the reader will see, it goes beyond it, for all life is one, the inner and the outer being indissoluble.

The book was written during a three-months' "retreat" in the Himalayas, the mornings being spent in writing and the afternoons and evenings in going through a course of reading—the only vacation—if it can be called one—that I have had for some years. It was the cold season, and these hills were deserted at that time, so that my only companions were an Indian secretary and the wild animals that roamed the estate—the deer, the panther, the tiger, and the wild pig. At noon, after a morning of writing, I would take a walk through these lovely mountain paths to clear my brain, only to return to find that my faithful secretary, who was unused to the mountains, had been spending anxious moments of prayer for me till I got back safely! It was the unknown to him—to me it was the beloved known. Perhaps many of my friends across the seas will share that same anxiety and will be in anxious prayer as we penetrate from the known personal to the jungle of social relationships, and will wonder if we should not stick to the beaten paths of personal religion. But this jungle of social relations must be Christianized, for Christ must claim all life.

At the close of the retreat I had the unspeakable privilege of presenting the manuscript, during May and June, to the Sat Tal Ashram Group, made up of many nationalities, and of receiving their criticisms and suggestions.

## INTRODUCTION

Many in that group were led into victorious living as we made our way through step by step, and now it goes to the larger circle, and it goes out with prayer, that among them too may be many who will find through these pages a clear path from confused and baffled and defeated human living to living that is certain, adequate, and victorious.

E. STANLEY JONES.



## FIRST WEEK

JANUARY 1

Job 11. 7-9    Job 23. 8-9  
Job 21. 15    John 14. 8

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### THE QUESTION THAT HALTS OUR QUEST

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In the beginning God (Genesis 1. 1).

It would be well if, in our quest for "Victorious Living," we could all begin with God. It would put a solid fact beneath our questing feet. It would give meaning and purpose to the whole of life. But, alas, many of us cannot begin there. For God is the vague, the unreal. We wish we could believe in Him, and get hold of Him so that we could live by Him, for life without the Great Companion has a certain emptiness and meaninglessness about it. For many skepticism is not voluntary, but apparently unavoidable. The facts of life are too much for us—the unemployment, the hunger of little children, the underlying strife in modern life, the exploitation of the weak and incapacitated by the strong, the apparently unmerited suffering around us, the heartlessness of nature, the discoveries of science which seem to render the hypothesis of God unnecessary—all these things, and more, seem to shatter our belief in God. We do not reject that belief; it simply fades away and becomes unreal. And we cannot assert what to us is not real. For amid all the losses of our modern day we are trying to save one thing amid the wreckage, namely, the desire for reality. We wish to keep an inner integrity. We loathe all unreality. That leads us to face the fact that our skepticism has gone deeper than the matter of belief in God; we find ourselves questioning life itself. Has life any meaning? Any goal? Is the flame of life within us different from the flame that leaps from the logs in the fireplace—both of them the result of material forces and both destined to die down into a final ash? If it has no ultimate meaning, has it any meaning now as we live it?

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O God, our Father—if we may call Thee thus—as we begin this quest we are haunted with many a biting fear and hesitation and doubt. Help us to face them all and come out, if possible, on the further side of them into victorious living. Amen.

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**SHALL WE FOLLOW A LIFE-NO OR A LIFE-YES?**

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There are just two elemental philosophies of life: that of Buddha and that of Christ. The rest are compromises between. When H. G. Wells chose the three greatest men of history he selected Christ, then Buddha, then Aristotle—Life-Affirmation, Life-Denial, and the Scientific Method. The two greatest characters of history head up two diametrically different outlooks on life. Both of them looked at the same facts of life and came to opposite conclusions—one to a final Yes, and the other to a final No.

Buddha, pondering under the Bo tree, came to the conclusion that existence and evil are one. The only way to get out of evil is to get out of existence itself. Nirvana is so close to annihilation that scholars are still doubting whether it means annihilation or not. "Is there any existence in Nirvana?" I asked a Buddhist monk in Ceylon. "How could there be?" he replied, "for if there were existence, there would be suffering." "Is it an emptiness, a cipher?" "It is an emptiness, a cipher," he replied with a final and decisive gesture. It is true that this is called "bliss," but it is the bliss of the world-weary. In its revolt against life the soul performs its final "hari-kari," clothed, it is true, with an air of sanctity and nobility. Buddha would cheat the sufferings and evils of life by getting rid of life itself. He would have us perform a sanctified suicide, not only of the physical, but of personality itself. It is a final "No" to life.

There is much to be said for Buddha's position. Everything seems to be under the process of decay. The blushing bride—then the withered old woman shriveling to fit her narrow final shroud. We grasp the lurid colors of the sunset and find that we have grasped the dark—first the beauty, then the blackness.

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O God, our Father, we stand confused and dismayed, not knowing if we shall be compelled to adopt the noble pessimism of souls like Buddha. Perhaps there is another way. We hardly dare to believe it. But show us the way—the way to life, if there is such a way. Amen.

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IS LIFE A BUBBLE OR IS IT AN EGG?

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A noble missionary drew near in spirit to Buddha when he said with a sigh, "Every new affection brings a new affliction." Bertrand Russell also took his stand with Buddha when he said, "All the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul which must struggle alone, with what courage it can command, against the whole weight of the universe that cares nothing for his hopes or fears." There are many modern followers of Buddha, unconscious, of course, but driven there by the hard facts of life. They worship with a sigh at the shrine of the "stupa."

Standing in the midst of a Buddhist ruin I asked the learned Indian curator why the stupa was always oval shaped. "Because Buddhism believes that life is a bubble, therefore the stupa is shaped like one," he replied. Life is a bubble—*sunnayavada*—"Nothingness" at its heart! At the very thought I felt the darkness close in upon me and my universe reel. But as I looked at it again light seemed to dawn: "Why, it isn't shaped like a bubble, it is shaped like an egg," I remarked, as I felt the rock beneath my feet.

Is life a bubble or is it an egg? Is it a bubble with nothing in it, or is it an egg filled with infinite possibilities—possibilities of growth and development and perfection? I vote for the egg view of life. I grant that even an egg, if badly handled, can turn rotten, so life can turn rotten if we handle it badly. Nevertheless, I shall have to vote on one side or the other of that question, and I shall tell you why I vote for the egg-view of life.

I follow a Man who saw just as deeply and more deeply than Buddha into the sorrow, the sheer misery of life and yet came out at the other end of it all and affirmed His faith in life. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He affirmed that life was not a bubble, but an egg. Was He right?

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O God, our Father, light gilds our darkened horizon as we listen to this Man. But will it be an *ignis fatuus* that leaves us floundering in the swamp of final despair? Help us, we pray. Amen.

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## IN WHICH WE LOOK AT THE ALTERNATIVES

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Is life a bubble or is it an egg? I must make my choice. On the one side, they tell us that the universe is slowly running down and that one day it will end in ash, carrying with it all things and all life to its final doom. Death shall reign. On the other hand, they tell us that the universe is being renewed by a silent and saving bombardment of life-giving rays, so that the last word is not being spoken by death but by life. Life shall reign. One says the universe is a bubble, the other says it is an egg.

On the one side, they tell us that man is made up of elements which can be purchased in a chemist shop for a few cents, so that life is only mucus and misery. On the other hand, they tell us that man is made in the image of the Divine, that he has infinite possibilities of growth and development before him. One says man is a bundle of futilities, the other says he is a bundle of possibilities.

On the one side, they say that man is just a composite of responses to stimuli from environment, mechanically determined and with no real power of choice. On the other hand, they say that man has sufficient freedom to determine his destiny and that the soul shapes its environment as well as being shaped by it. One says that human freedom is a bubble, the other says it is an egg.

Some say that prayer is an autosuggesting of oneself into illusory states of mind, that nothing comes back save the echo of one's own voice. Others say that in prayer actual communication takes place, that I link myself with the resources of God, so that my powers and faculties are heightened and life is strengthened and purified at its center. One says prayer is futile, the other says it is fertile.

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O God, our Father, we want life, but not false life. Show us if there is real life, and if there is, help us to choose it. Amen.

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## IN WHICH WE CONTINUE TO LOOK AT THE ALTERNATIVES

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On the one side, there are those who tell us that God is an unnecessary hypothesis, that science can explain all, that the interstices and gaps of the universe into which we used to put the working of God are being slowly but surely filled up by science, so that the universe is self-sufficient, law-abiding, and predictable. On the other hand, there are those who tell us that God is not to be found in the gaps and interstices and in an occasional breaking into the process, but He is in the process itself the life of its life; that the universe is dependable because God is dependable; that it works according to law because God's mind is an orderly mind, not whimsical and notional, that since intelligence comes out of the universe and meets my intelligence it must have gone into it, so that according to Jeans "the universe is more like a thought than a machine"; that since the universe seems to work toward purposive ends, we must either endow matter with intelligent purposes (in which case it would not be mere matter), or we must put a purposive creative Intelligence in and back of the process; that since the universe from the tiniest atom to the farthest star is mathematical, we must either believe that matter has sufficient intelligence to be mathematical, or else that "God is a pure mathematician"; it would seem that the purposive matter-hypothesis takes more sheer credulity than that there is an Infinite Spirit, called God, who is within the process working toward intelligent moral ends, inviting our limited spirits to work with Him toward intelligent, redemptive purposes.

One says the idea of God is a bubble, the other says it is an egg. I must make my choice.

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O God, our Father, shall I rule Thee out and vote for a dead universe—dead because its final goal is death? Or shall I vote for a living universe with Thee as its genesis, with Thee as its perpetual Creator and with Thee as its goal and end? Clarify my mind, my heart, that I may not lose myself and Thee amid the maze of things. Amen.

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## IN WHICH WE STILL CONTINUE TO LOOK AT THE ALTERNATIVES

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There are those who tell us that Christ is a spent force in humanity; that Carlyle was right when he stood before the Italian wayside crucifix and slowly shook his head and said, "Poor Fellow, you have had your day"; that His day is over because He spoke to a simple age, but now we face a complicated, scientific age; that He was good, but not good enough—for us.

On the other hand, there are those who feel, with the Carlyle of later years, that His day is just beginning; that what has failed has been a miserable caricature and not the real thing; that even the partial application of His teaching and spirit has been one thing which has kept the soul of humanity alive; that He has been and is the depository and creator of the finest and best in humanity; that when we have hold of Him we have the key to God, to the meaning of the universe and to our own lives; that when we expose ourselves to Him in simplicity and obedience, life is changed, lifted, renewed, that He is the one really unspent force in religion—He faces this age as the Great Contemporary and its Judge. One says that dependence upon Jesus is a bubble, an illusion, the other says it is an egg with untold redemptive possibilities.

There are those who say that conversion is an adolescent phenomenon; coincident with and caused by the awakening of the sex instinct; or that it is the result of mob-suggestion, easily induced and quickly evanescent. On the other hand, many affirm that this change called conversion helps them control and redirect the powers of the sex instinct, and that far from being mob-suggestion it helps them to cut across the purposes of both the mob and the self when they are wrong. One says that conversion is a bubble, the other says that it is an egg.

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O God, our Father, hold us steady as we face the issues. May there be no dodging, no turning to irrelevancies, and no excuses. Save us to the real. Amen.

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## IN WHICH WE MAKE OUR CHOICE

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The issues of life are before me, I must vote for or against a view of life which has worth, purpose, goal. If I vote that the universe has no meaning, then I vote that my own life has none. But if my life has no meaning and hence no purpose, it will go to pieces, for psychology tells us that without a strong controlling purpose, which co-ordinates life, the personality disintegrates through its own inner clashes—no purpose, no personality. But that purpose must be high enough to lift me out of myself. If my purposes end with myself, again I disintegrate. They must include God, who gives basis and lasting meaning to my purpose. If I lose God, I lose myself, my universe, everything. I see that Voltaire was right when he said, "If there is no God, we will have to invent one to keep sane."

If I let go of Christ, then God becomes the Distant, the Vague, the Unreal. In Christ I find "the near side of God." In Him God speaks to me a language I can understand, a human language. And as I listen to that Language my universe seems to become a Face—tender, strong, forgiving, redemptive. Law becomes Love.

If I do not sincerely get into touch with Him through the written Word, I neglect the greatest and most redemptive fact of history and I pay the penalty of being unfed at the place of my deepest need. If I do not pray, I shall probably become cynical and shallow. If I do pray, I shall probably get nerve and courage, a sense of adequacy, power over wayward desires and passions. If I undergo a moral and spiritual change called conversion, I shall probably be unified, morally straight, and spiritually adjusted. If I do not, I shall probably become a stunted human soul.

If I must vote, then I do. *I vote for Life.*

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O God, our Father, I make the choice, I do choose life with all its fullest, deepest implications. Help me to find life and live it—victoriously. Amen.

## SECOND WEEK

JANUARY 8

Romans 8. 19-23 (Weymouth)  
Matthew 5. 48

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### WHY ARE WE RELIGIOUS?

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There are a hundred and fifty or more various definitions of religion. One says it is "what we do with our solitariness"; another that it is "how we integrate ourselves socially"; another that "the root of religion is fear," and so on.

The reason that it is so difficult to define is that life is difficult to define. When we define religion in terms of its various manifestations, we get partial, sometimes contradictory definitions. Religion having many forms has one root. That root is in the urge after life, fuller life. In everything, from the lowest cell clear up to the highest man, there is an urge toward completion, toward perfection. "Everything lifts up strong hands toward perfection." The religious urge is found in that urge for completer life. It is that urge tuned toward higher, nobler ends. We feel that we cannot be complete unless this urge for life is fastened upon the highest life, God. Religion is the urge for life turned qualitative. It is not satisfied with life apart from quality. The urge for quantitative life reached its crest in the dinosaurs. That failed—it was a road with a dead end. The huge animals died. In man the life urge turns from being merely big to being better. The qualitative and the moral emerge.

We are religious, then, because we cannot help it. We want to live in the highest, fullest sense, and that qualitative expression of life is called religion. So religion is not a cloak we can put on or off; it is identified with life itself. We are all incurably religious. Even the Communists, though repudiating religion, are deeply religious. They want a better social order. They may be right or wrong in the method of getting it, but the very desire for a better social order is religious. For religion is a cry for life.

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O God, our Father, who planted this urge for completion within us? Didst Thou? Then, O my God, this urge is not in vain. Thou hast inspired it. Thou shalt satisfy it with Thyself. Amen.