



# The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

---

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net  
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

*In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.*

---

## Spiritual Capacity

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." (John 16:12).

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food." (Heb. 5:11-12).

"And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal." (Rev. 21:16).

A vital and indispensable factor in usefulness to the Lord is spiritual capacity. It is a basic principle of service, and we may say that the measure of our real fruitfulness, of the value of our service to the Lord is the measure of our spiritual capacity.

We have the passage in the Revelation, "the city lies foursquare"; the length and the breadth are equal; he measured it twelve thousand furlongs, length, breadth and height. Undoubtedly what is intended there is to impress with the great dimensions of the City. We know that the City is a type of the church, and we know quite well both from the Revelation and other parts of the Word that the City is intended to serve a great purpose - it is something with a vocation, the nations are going to get from the City, the City therefore has something to give. That is its object. Changing the title of the church, it stands in that position in the thought of God, and in order to serve its Divinely appointed

purpose and fulfil its heavenly vocation, it must be something with capacity, so that, as we have said, a vital and indispensable factor in usefulness to the Lord is spiritual capacity. For His own glory (and that comes out in the City, "having the glory of God" that He may be glorified), for His own satisfaction, for His own service, spiritual capacity is indispensable. Everything hangs upon it so far as the Lord's end in us is concerned.

Now we see that inasmuch as the City is presented there complete, finished, full, that is the end to which the Lord is working. The object which the Lord has before Him all the time in the saints is spiritual capacity. To that He gives Himself and takes infinite pains. It governs all His ways with His people. Spiritual capacity is the end which God has in view, to which He is working, because everything for Him does rest upon it. If that is so, then we have got to give some very careful attention to this matter.

### **Spiritual Capacity**

First of all, we must note that it is *spiritual* capacity. This matter of capacity can become a problem unless we approach it in the right way, from the right standpoint. What I mean is this, that there are those who feel that they have no capacity or that their capacity is very minute; they have what is nowadays called 'an inferiority complex'. They have settled it that they were born small and they will always remain small. They are not much and they never will be very much, and they look at other people who are naturally made on a larger scale than themselves and feel that these are the people who are going to get somewhere. These are the people who are going to count.

It may be that the thing is reviewed in the reverse order. We may take note of people who are naturally limited in capacity and decide that there is not much hope for them, they will not go far, they will not count for very much.

Well now, whatever the sovereignty of God may have to say in these matters, you and I have got to suspend a finality of judgment on that line because we may very likely get some surprises. We find that the people whom we thought were going to be so much and count for so much have, after all, faded out and are not coming up to expectations, and the people we thought did not count very much represent something very much more than we ever imagined they would, and so we must underline the word *spiritual*. It is spiritual capacity, and spiritual capacity may have nothing to do with natural capacity and we have to sift this matter out, analyse it and find out what spiritual capacity is.

There are people who naturally have great powers of mind, powers of control, government and organisation. We call them strong-minded people or people with personality, or capable people. When those people come into the realm of spiritual things or Divine truth, they very quickly get a hold on the truth and a comprehensive hold and an analytical hold, and it may be that they can speak very much in the realm of that truth. You see the direction of that, and I want to say at once: that is not spiritual capacity. The test will come sooner or later. How much can you and I stand reverses and setbacks, go through trial and suffering and misunderstanding and misrepresentation and all that whole realm of things? How much can we go through sweetly, triumphantly, trustingly? That is the thing which determines our spiritual capacity. Spiritual capacity is a thing by itself, and it is that that the Lord is after. It is that which is of value to the Lord. It is that which is fruitful in service. I am not going to press these differences very much. I want to indicate that it is spiritual

value that the Lord has in view, and it may be that natural capacity or capability has nothing whatever to do with this matter, whether it be there or whether it be absent.

### **Enlargement of Spiritual Capacity by Suffering**

Values in God's sight are only spiritual values. And spiritual value does not begin with what we can do and what we know, it begins with what we are, and that is only shown when we are in the fire, whatever that fire may mean where we are concerned. Fire means a different thing to almost every different child of God. What is fire to me, would not be fire to you. That is, what I could go through without perhaps being very much troubled, you could not go through, but what you can go through easily, I could not. It would be a tremendous ordeal to me, it is fire to me, and that is the thing. The fire finds us out, whatever the fire means for each one of us. It is the fiery trial, and remember that the alternative word is "test", the fiery test, the fiery finding out. Well, it is spiritual measure, spiritual capacity that matters and that the Lord has in view, and what we have just said is not only the way in which it is discovered, but it is the method used by the Lord to produce it. What about the enlargement of spiritual capacity? Oh, now you are concerned about this matter! You have perhaps come to your own conclusions about it. Perhaps they have been conclusions on that natural basis of which I have spoken. You are not much and you never can be. Certain people are not much and they never will be much. Certain other people - well, they are going a long way!

Let us come right to the point. Are we going to conclude that in the City, in the church, there are those whose spiritual measure does not matter to the Lord? Have you concluded that? That, so far as you are concerned, He says, "They are not much, they never will be, I am not interested in them. I am only interested in these people." We dare not take that attitude. The Lord is concerned for as large a measure in every one of His members as He can secure. Let us settle that.

Then, being concerned about spiritual capacity - and I do hope you are exercised about it and that it does matter to you how much the Lord may have in you - being concerned about spiritual capacity, then you say, "How can spiritual capacity be produced and increased?" The answer is not one perhaps that we should swiftly accept or invite, but it is quite patent. There is only one way of enlargement, and that is trial, suffering - whatever that may mean. David cried, "In pressure hast thou enlarged me", and there is no other way. Trial, suffering - this alone is the way of spiritual enlargement. You can put the emphasis where you like. It will be most helpful to say it is the way of enlargement. Emphatically it is.

It proved to be so with the disciples to whom He said those words, "I have many things... but ye cannot... now." They went the way of emptying, the way of losing everything here on this earth, and I do not mean just their temporal things, their homes, families, money, and that sort of thing. They lost their Christ here on this earth, they lost their faith here on this earth. They lost their Kingdom of God here on this earth. They found all in heaven, not after they died, but before they died, but they lost everything as a merely temporal, earthly thing, and they were left, shall we say, stranded, left without a vestige. Those two men walking to Emmaus speak of those who have been shorn and bereft of everything. "We had hoped". In order words, "Our hope has been shattered by what has happened". But that was the way of enlargement, and what enlargement! Stripping, emptying. It always is that. It explains the Lord's dealings with us. He is working, remember, with a positive object in view all the time, never just to empty and humble and break us, but for spiritual measure, enlargement, spiritual capacity. The City is in His eye all the time. Twelve thousand furlongs! Now let us get inside of that.

## **"The Trial of Your Faith"**

Upon what principle does the Lord work to enlargement? What is, after all, the heart of every trial, every bit of suffering? It is only one word, it is faith. "The trial of your *faith*". Every trial that God allows, every bit of fiery testing which is by His permission, has that object in view. Don't forget it! It always is a question of faith. God hangs everything in this dispensation upon one word, and that is faith. We could get out to very great dimensions of Divine truth. The church is the chief feature of God's interest in this whole dispensation, from the day that the Lord Jesus was received up into glory until He comes again. But what is the church for? The church's vocation is to be that vessel in which it is manifest that God has undone all the work that Satan did. That is tremendous! In Christ, and Christ in the church, the inclusive, comprehensive meaning is that all Satan ever brought into this universe has got to be put out of this universe through the church. And the point upon which Satan scored at the beginning and brought it all in and has operated all the way through, has been unbelief, that unbelief which is right there rooted in the very being of every child of Adam. And in the church God is going to destroy that unbelief in a Man, One New Man, and eventually have a corporate Man which has destroyed Satan in the power of the blood of the Lamb along the line of unbelief. God must do it. He has done it in His Son, but He has brought a Body into relationship with Him as Head, and He who said in Gen. 3:15: "He shall bruise thy head", has also said in Romans, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly", bringing the Head and the members together in one crushing of the serpent. He is doing that, but the principle upon which Satan always works is that of unbelief.

Unbelief works in a thousand different ways - inability to trust God - but there it is, one thing all the time.

Now the fiery trial is concerning faith, and faith is the measure of capacity and therefore faith is the measure of service to God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." In the end: "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony." That is not some phraseology that they used. It is a *position* they occupied.

I am not going to follow that further, but if that is true, if every trial which brings up in a new way the whole issue of faith is intended by God to be that which goes before new usefulness to the Lord, fresh value to the Lord - and there is service in view, usefulness to the Lord in view, real spiritual value to the Lord in view, yes there is service ahead, that is the point - and God introduces every bit of enlarged usefulness with an enlargement of spiritual capacity. He keeps these things together. If we did but recognise the law of service! It is this. Service is not according to what we have mentally apprehended of doctrine. Service is governed by the Lord entirely according to what we know of Him and of our spiritual capacity. In view of the tremendous work and activity going on for the Lord, that is perhaps a serious, almost questionable thing to say, but nevertheless it is true. Real service stands in spiritual measure.

### **The Indwelling Holy Spirit the Basis of Every Possibility**

The hope that makes all this possible is the fact of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You see, in John 16:12 the complete statement is, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come...". When the Spirit is come, a great deal more will be possible, and the fact that the Spirit has come and that the Spirit dwells in us, provides a basis of every possibility. He is there with all the fulness, He is there to make everything clear, to lead us into

the fulness of Christ. The Holy Spirit can only have His way as we are out of it, because we are the trouble. We are the limiting factor. We get in the Lord's way in multitudes of ways, and all this fiery trial is really getting us out of the way and making way for the Lord, enlarging room for Him.

### **The Need for Exercise**

Just come back to that with which we started. In that passage in Hebrews, the writer pointed out that this lack of ability to receive what was available was because there had been little or no exercise, and so he links exercise with capacity. Babies who have not exercised their senses can only take milk, he says. Full-grown men who exercise their faculties can take meat.

Well now, here is a question of exercise. You notice that the Lord has no royal road to fulness. It is always along the line of exercise. When certain people came to Joshua and said that the bit of the inheritance given them was hardly good enough for such great people as they were, Joshua did not say, "You are wonderful people - you must have more." He said, "There is a difficult bit of hill country up there. Prove you are great people! Take it, reduce it, cultivate it, turn it to account! Exercise!" Exercise is God's law of enlargement always.

So I ask you, what about exercise over spiritual capacity? Are you using what you have got to the full? Are you exercised over God's word as it is given? Do you go to Him about it? Do you take it as an address, something more you have heard, or do you get down to business before the Lord and really hold on to it? And over this whole matter of spiritual capacity - it is something about which to be exercised really before the Lord.

Let us ask the Lord to find in us those who respond; to make it possible for Him to bring out all that is in His heart, that there shall be no stay of that which is not just truth and revelation, but vital to the church. And praying for yourself and yourselves, for one another, will you pray the Lord that He will prepare a people to receive that which is vital to the church's coming to God's end, to hold that position of responsibility in the ages to come.