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You cannot attach a more precarious tag to a man's name and reputation these days than to label him an outstanding Christian.

Disciples of our affluent image-making society promptly envision some kind of ecclesiastical oddity. Clergymen, to be sure, ought to be men of God. But for us laymen to seek the divine life is another matter. We should be dynamic in our communities. We should bolster the nation's economy. We should build and scheme and flex our muscles. We ought to attend church and contribute to its material needs. But we are not to be men who pray, men who take the Bible at face value, men who witness.

I realize this is the day of the hippy, the draft card burner, the rioter, disciples of the Hindu ashram, but these abnormalities run in packs and in their conformity to faddist nonconformity escape the disdain encountered by standing alone.

What a sorry state we are in!

Well, if being serious about one's faith is a social error, I plead guilty, but with neither remorse nor apology. It is being thought of as an oddity that unnerves me. Not from a matter of personal pride, however. I'm upset about the whims of a society in which spiritual hunger and fulfillment seem to have become so abnormal.

Let me attempt an explanation.

My name is Stanley Tam. I'm a layman, a businessman. By many marketplace measurements I've succeeded in business. I like to sell, like to introduce new products, like to watch volume grow, like to

make money. Recently the Dun and Bradstreet representative from our area went over our books and told me we had the most vigorous growth pattern of any comparable firm in our area. Right now I'm giving careful thought to another of a succession of expansion moves in our two corporations.

But although my business requires long hours at the office and constant surveillance and promotion, buying and selling is really no more than an avocation with me. My first concern is to succeed as a Christian. Let me state that a bit more definitely. My prime effort in life is to be obedient to my God, to serve Him and bring credit to His name.

Yet I insist I am not purposely trying to be a nonconformist. I'm not some overaged hippy, not an iconoclast, but a reasonably average human being.

Average?

Well, maybe I should strike that word from the record—not so much as it pertains to me but as it relates to God's potential for both you and me. For in the world as it is structured today, we should not settle for the spiritual plight of the average man.

I can understand the plight of being average in mentality or in physical endowments—because I surely qualify in both categories—but I do not understand why so many Christians read a Bible abounding in promises to make them something beyond themselves and yet settle for a spiritual vitality so mediocre as to seem virtually nonexistent. Consequently, the Christian who becomes demonstrably involved with God is looked upon as the rare exception far above the established rule.

On the contrary, it is my conviction God intended the full, rewarding life to be every person's birthright. We deny ourselves God's best for us by our own default, our impaired and often corroded sense of values. In God's sight, I am convinced, the oddity is the man who misses His mark for him, and the norm is the man who discovers the Christian life in all its dynamic perspective.

That's what Christianity is—the discovery of life!

No, even though obedience to God is my greatest concern, I do not consider myself an oddity. Nor am I trying to be different. I'm human, very much so, and I struggle to keep pride from blighting my Christian witness and perspective. Prejudices creep into my thought patterns and must be ferreted out. In the push of business I sometimes ask too much of my people and must apologize and

make amends. My wife and four daughters could painfully document profuse evidences of stark humanity in my personal life. Though I try to make my Christian witness believable, as much of life as breath and heartbeat, some people have been known to cast reflections on my activities. Doubtless, at least in some cases, the impetus stems from a fault of my own.

But I believe tenaciously in the possibility of a man linking his life to God. I believe this to be the only truly good life, the kind of life within the grasp of every man, if he will simply and honestly endeavor to meet God's conditions.

Because of the unique way God has been pleased to bless this conviction, some rather unusual things have happened in my business. As a result, service clubs, churches, schools, and numerous other agencies all over North America permit me to address them giving testimony of God's intervention in my life. I have spoken to Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant groups. Monday and Tuesday may find me in the office, Wednesday at a banquet downtown; Thursday back in the office, Friday at a men's meeting in Omaha, the weekend in Portland or Seattle. Then back again for business the following Monday.

Often when the opportunity is given for me to share my story, other men experience a desire for spiritual involvement in their own lives. This is the psychology of life, eyeball-to-eyeball encounters with others. There is no better way to sell, no better way to communicate, to put ideas into motion.

Thus my motivation for recording this brief chronicle of my personal experiences—not so you can better understand Stanley Tam, but in the prayerful hope that encouragement and renewal will come to your own quest for the good and full life.

First, however, let me urge you not to use me as an example. I must live Stanley Tam's life, being obedient to the directives I feel God gives me, and you must live your life, being equally obedient to the priorities God asks of you. As feedback to my intimately pronounced intentions to obey Him, God has made what might be called singular demands upon my life. He may do the same to you or choose to orient and motivate you in completely different ways.

In my case I felt clearly directed by God literally to make Him my Senior Partner. At the outset this may seem naïve to you. If so, please hear me out. It's true. The stock in our two corporations is not owned by me or by members of our family; it is controlled by

a non-profit corporation whose sole purpose is to dispense funds for Christian work around the world. The only way my wife and I could regain control of the business would be to buy back the stock from that corporation.

But this was God's directive to us. He may lead you in an entirely different way. What's important is that you permit Him to show you His way, and when you see this way laid out before you, follow it in complete obedience. Obedience to God is the key to happiness and success in this life, our assurance of productive immortality.

Sample

We Tams are Scotch by extraction.

So the desire to make money probably entered my blood by genetic processes.

Great-grandfather McBeth, one of the stalwarts in my mother's lineage, emigrated from Scotland in 1849 when the whiff of gold sent men trampling over each other on the mad rush toward California. He apparently did well, for he eventually entered the banking business.

I was born just outside San Francisco, California, in 1915.

Grandfather Tam contributed no less to my heritage. Though perhaps not so adept in fiscal enterprises, he was a colorful individual. As a young man his eyes caught the glimmer of vaudeville lights, but since we Tams cannot lay claim to anything but ordinary physical prowess, he took up the art of legerdemain and actually became quite an accomplished magician. Vaudeville did not want for talent in those early days, however, and he gave far more performances in country schoolhouses than on the stage. My father served as his assistant.

Though he forsook magic in his later years, he kept a trunk full of tricks, and we children often succeeded in urging him to bring out his display and give us his rusty but nonetheless awesome artistry with the Chinese rings and now-you-see-it-now-you-don't bags and boxes of all sizes and descriptions.

In later years grandfather gave vent to his show business interests

by teaming with my father in the purchase of several movie theaters, venturing as far away as Biloxi, Mississippi. Bright lights did not especially appeal to the son however, and on a vacation trip to Ohio he and my mother liked the looks of the Midwest and subsequently bought a farm in the Buckeye State.

I've lived in Ohio ever since.

We worked hard on the farm. One year we marketed five thousand bushels of potatoes and two thousand bushels of beans. Not bad for a 174 acre site that also pastured livestock and provided living space for the family.

Farming didn't appeal to me, particularly the hard manual labor involved. I did my bit. But I would sit by the hours mulling over get-rich-quick offers which came to our rural mailbox so often in those days. When I could afford the price of postage, I clipped coupons and sent in for free samples and information, making the daily arrival of the mail carrier a gala event. And what a wonderful array it was. Garden seeds. Candy samples. Automotive lubricants. Kitchen extracts. Surefire potions for gaining or losing weight. Cream to remove freckles. Greasy stuff to glamorize the hair. The manly art of self-defense. Secrets of ventriloquism. Mesmerism. Finding buried treasure. Insuring long life.

With many of these samples came sales programs virtually guaranteed to make one independent overnight. I wanted to try my hand at selling, but congenital shyness held me back. How could I ever hope to muster sufficient courage? I dreamed of becoming a salesman. I wanted to make something of myself, but the grit to start just wasn't in me.

But I did have initiative, and I expended it on odd jobs of every description. If I saw a neighbor's house needing improvement, I would suggest it and offer myself as the solution. I painted mailboxes, mended fences, washed windows, mowed lawns.

Then one day in a moment of gumption I clipped a coupon, mailed it to the firm involved, and subsequently found myself set up with a display case for door-to-door peddling of household items.

It was painful.

But I slowly built confidence, could take refusals in stride, and began polishing the technique of turning a sale. Business did not boom in proportion to the adjectives in the advertisements, but it wasn't long until I needed the assistance of two fellow schoolmates as auxiliary salesmen. John D. Rockefeller, the tycoon of that era,