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Hanging on to One String

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The gifted concert violinist, Niccolò Paganini, was standing before a packed house surrounded by a full orchestra. He had played a number of difficult pieces, and it was now time to play one of his favorites—a violin concerto. His beautiful playing held the Italian audience in rapt attention. Shortly after he began, one of the strings on his violin snapped and dangled from the instrument. Relying on his genius, he improvised and played on the next three strings. But to his surprise, shortly thereafter a second string broke on his instrument. Now there were two strings dangling from his violin. Again he began to improvise and played the piece on the two remaining strings. As he neared the end of this magnificent concerto, a third string snapped. Now there were three dangling strings, and he finished the piece on only one string.

The audience stood and applauded until their hands were numb, never thinking to ask for an encore. They expected to leave. As they sat down, Paganini held his instrument high in the air and said, “Paganini and one string!” He played a full encore with the orchestra accompaniment and made more music out of one string than many violinists ever could on four. *His greatest moment was when he was down to one string!*

Have you ever been down to one string in your life? Things happen, and one by one the strings that hold our cheery dispositions together break. We begin to pay more attention to the one, two, or three strings that are dangling than to the *one* that is still intact. That’s when we allow bitterness, sorrow, self-pity, and even blame to grow in our hearts. It’s easy to become upset when three of our strings snap. We feel that we deserve four strings like everybody else.

May I share a plain truth with you? There are very few four stringers out there! We are all struggling with broken strings. I guess many of us hide it better than others, but there are many times in all of our lives when we are down to one string. How do some people weather the storm so well while others are crushed under the load? The answer is *attitude!*

Your attitude toward life is very im-

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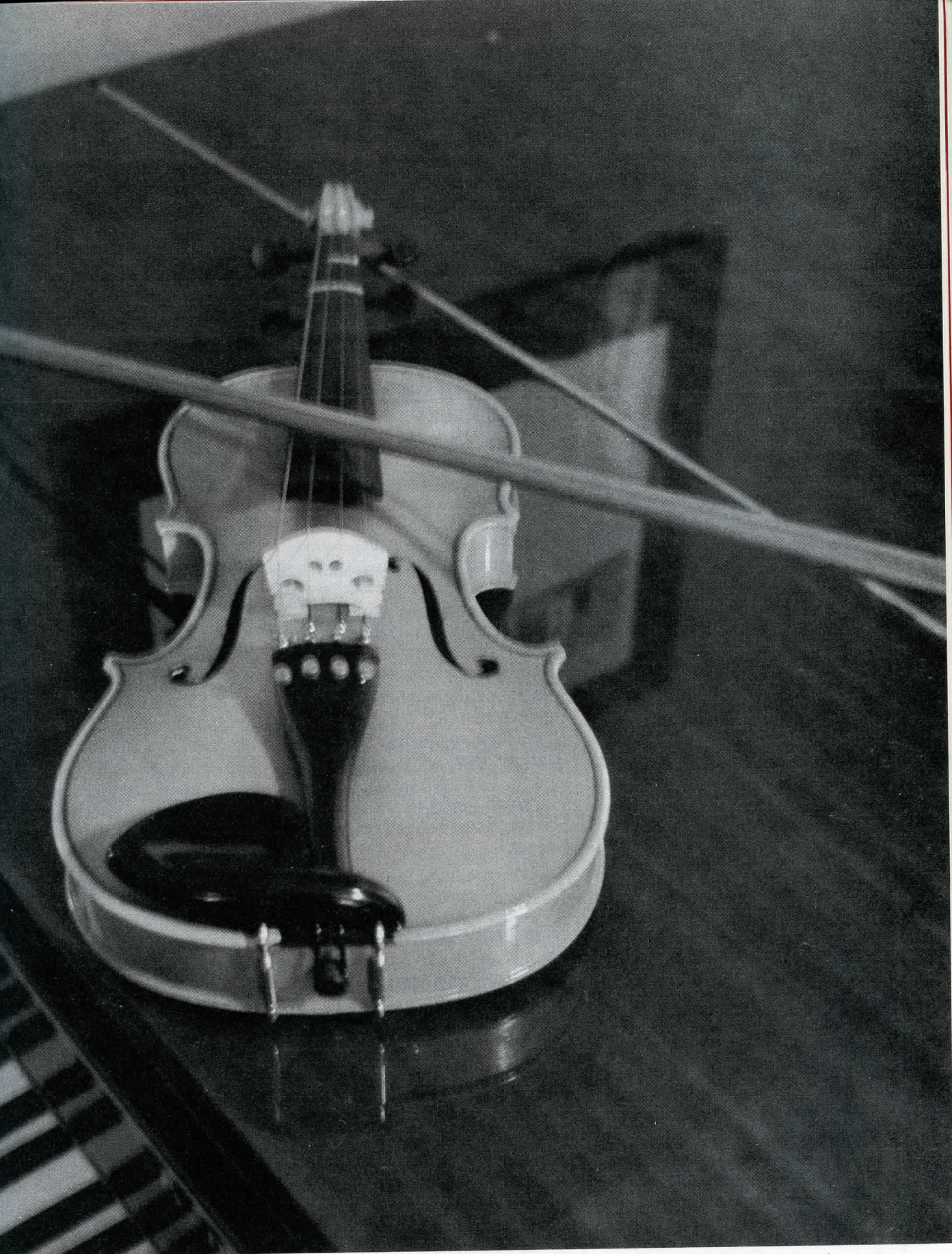


Photo by: Cindy Corn/Corn Photo Service

member of 1 Corinthians 12 (Paul argues there is no such thing in the spiritual body). The perception of these Christians is that all decisions are made for them and they are not asked for, or allowed, input. Therefore, they don't give their money.

On the other hand, many leaders do not encourage involvement. They want to know everything that is going on; so there is no "letting go." They want to *demand* "follower-ship" rather than earn it through service to the body and love for every member. This leadership model will wonder why members don't come, and why they are so critical. It is because they have not been asked—*really* asked—to serve and let ministry be theirs.

Growing, dynamic churches are characterized by members who take initiative, and by leaders who know and encourage growth. Look around you. Are there any improvements to be made where you stand? /Bob Mize—Spring, TX.

IMAGE



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American Military Evangelizing Nations

(Books and Letters, cont. from p. 13)

town Hereford, there is a unique church library containing 1,444 *chained* books, the world's largest collection. These priceless volumes were chained to prevent their being stolen, to keep them available for all who visit the church. The oldest of these is an *Anglo-Saxon Gospels* which has been locked within this library for some 1200 years!

There is a lesson for us here. The gospel of Jesus is the most revolutionary message the world has ever received. But we have adopted a "library" model of the church, viewing ourselves as trustees of truth, or at best, instructors in it. Our treasured text is "chained" inside our churches. (Compare the Jews' relationship to their Law as described in Romans 2:17-20!) The "library" model is inappropriate to the revolutionary ideology contained in the New Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount is a statement, not of truths to be believed so much as the truth we are to *become* in Christ. It is not a barricade against the world, but a broadcast within it.

I believe a more scriptural model of the church and its mission is the "Message" model. This is the image Paul employs in describing the Corinthians as "a letter from Christ" (2 Cor. 3:3). We are sent out to be "known and read by all men" (v. 2). Thus we are not trustees or teachers so much as personal *transmissions of truth*. Where the stone tablets of old were "written with the finger of God" (Exod. 37:18), our hearts are now the writing tablet of "the Spirit of the living God."

From *Common Sense*, to *Communist Manifesto*—the books which changed the world have this in common: they were not simply believed, or even obeyed, but *embodied*. Christ calls us to the same level of absolute enactment. The great choice facing the church is between two images of ourselves: Are we chained books, or living letters? The choice we make will either chain the Word, or change the world. /Shawn Jones—Houston, TX.

IMAGE

(Hanging On, cont. from p. 18)

his event. So it is with us and Christ.

(2) Work hard (2 Tim. 2:15). Anything that is worthwhile is only gained by working hard. There is no free lunch in religion.

(3) Be fearless (2 Tim. 1:7). The more that I grow and mature in my faith the more power I realize that we can have. The more power you allow in your life the better your attitude will be, no matter how thin that one string gets.

(4) Don't ever stop (Rev. 2:10). Christ said to be faithful till death! How many of us begin an effort toward evangelism or edification of the saints only to become discouraged when one string pops and discontinue the whole program. Christ never stopped until his mission was accomplished. If we are his followers then we never should either!

(5) Be patient with yourself and others (James 5:11). Patience doesn't grow overnight. But as it grows, patience can give you the power to keep going when many others have thrown up their hands in despair.

(6) Finally, be content with what you have (1 Tim. 6:6). This is hard, because the world constantly bombards us with a materialistic emphasis. Allow the emphasis in your life to be on things above the material. Never allow external conditions to rob you of being a winner. You can be sure that Paul didn't (Phil. 4:11).

How many of you are hanging on to one string? Congratulations! Join the club! Now, what are you doing with that one string? It all depends on what is inside your heart. Paul could rejoice from a prison cell. Christ forgave his enemies while he was suspended between heaven and earth on a cross. Stephen prayed for his enemies forgiveness when their stones crushed his defenseless body. Look at what they did with their one string! Boy, do we have a long way to go.

Make that one steady string in your life count for something as you *endure the daily struggle with temptation*. May God bless you in your efforts! /Barry Fike—Rockford, IL.

IMAGE