Book 6

Sunday September 19, 1976

"JESUS WAS TYPE 'B'" Luke 10:38-42

Martha didn't know it, but she was a "Type A" person! If she persisted in her behavior and attitude, she would be a prime candidate for a heart attack. Why do I say this?

After more than 30 years of studying coronary heart disease in the consultation room, at the hospital bedside and in the laboratory, some physicians are convinced that even though we have been given information about what to eat, about exercise, about the dangers of smoking, we have been denied the most important information of all--the facts about what may be the major cause of premature coronary heart disease. Two researchers have for lack of a better name called this "TYPE A" personality or behavior.

Their research shows that in the absence of Type A behavior patterns, coronary heart disease almost never occurs before 70 years of age, regardless of fatty foods eaten, the cigarettes smoked, or the lack of exercise. But when this behavior pattern is present, coronary heart disease can easily erupt in one's 30's or 40's. Now of course, these same researchers go on to point out that if in addition to Type A behavior, one smokes and gets little exercise and eats the wrong kind of foods, the probability of coronary heart disease is even greater.

What is a Type A behavior pattern? According to the researchers, "It is a particular complex of personality traits, including excessive competitive drive, agressiveness, impatience and a compelling sense of time urgency. Individuals displaying this pattern seem to be engaged in a chronic, ceaseless, and often fruitless struggle--with themselves, with others, with circumstances, with time, sometimes with life itself. They also exhibit a free-floating but well-rationalized form of hostility, and almost always a deep-eated insecurity."

Notice how this modern day description fits Martha in the story from Luke. Martha was overly aggressive and extremely impatient. Luke also describes her as being distracted with much serving. She was going in all directions at once, hurrying around as if the world would come to an end if she didn't get the food ready by her own deadline.

The person with the Type B behavior pattern and personality is exactly the opposite. He or she is rarely driven by

desires to keep obtaining a wildly increasing number of things or to participate in an endlessly growing series of events in an ever decreasing amount of time. His or her intelligence may be as good or even better than that of the Type A person. Type B's ambition may be as great or even greater than that of Type A. Type B may also have a considerable amount of drive and energy, but its character is such that it seems to steady the person, to give confidence and security, rather than to goad, irritate and infuriate as with the Type A person. According to the New Testament accounts of the life and personality of Jesus, he certainly was Type B.

Not only was Jesus Christ Type B, but as we can see from the story of Mary and Martha, he wanted Martha to become Type B also. "Martha," he said, "You are overly anxious about too many trivial things. Take time to relax." To become a Type B person in the sense that Jesus was, is to have a deeply spiritual and trusting attitude toward God and toward life itself.

Incidentally, a person's economic position or kind of job or profession or whether a person is a success in his or her field or not, has nothing to do with whether one is Type A or Type B. The presidents of many banks and corporations may be Type B individuals. Conversely, many janitors, shoe salespersons, truck drivers, architects and even florists and preachers may be Type A persons.

Overwhelmingly, the most significant trait of the Type A person is an habitual sense of time urgency or "hurry sickness." But let's be more specific.

According to the researchers, you possess Type A behavior if you have a habit of explosively accentuating various key words in your ordinary speech even when there is no need for such accentuation, and a tendency to utter the last few words of your sentences far more rapidly than the opening words.

You are Type A if you always move, walk and eat rapidly. You are Type A if you feel and particularly if you openly exhibit to others an impatience with the rate at which most events take place. You may be suffering from this sort of impatience if you find it difficult to restrain yourself from hurrying the speech of others and resort to the device of quickly saying over and over again, "U huh, uh huh," or

"yes, yes, yes, yes." to someone who is talking, unconsciously urging him or her to "get on with" or hasten the rate of speaking. You are also suffering from this impatience if you attempt to finish the sentences of persons speaking to you before they can.

Other signs of the hurry sickness or impatience are--if you become unduly irritated or even enraged when a car ahead of you in your lane runs at a pace you consider too slow; or is too slow on the start when the light turns green; or if you find it anguishing to wiat in a line or to wait your turn to be seated at a restaurant; or if you find it intolerable to watch others perform tasks you know you can do faster. If you find y ourself always hurrying your reading or always attempting to obtain condensations or summaries of truly interesting and worthwhile literature.

You are Type A, if while golfing or fishing you continue to ponder your business or professional problems, or if while using an electric razor you attempt also to eat breakfast or drive your car, or if while driving your car you attempt to dictate letters for your secretary. There are even Type A persons who not only shave and eat simultaneously, but also manage to read a business journal at the same time.

You are Type A if you always feel vaguely guilty when you relax and do absolutely nothing for several hours to several days.

You are a Type B person if you are completely free of all the habits and exhibit none of the traits we have listed that harass the severely afflicted Type A. If you never suffer from a sense of time urgency with its accompanying impatience. If you harbor no free-floating hostility, and you feel no need to display or discuss either your achievements or accomplishments unless such exposure is demanded by the situation. If when you play, you do so to find fun and relaxation, rather than to exhibit your superiority at any cost. If you can truly relax without guilt, just as you can work without agitation, then you are Type B.

Incidentally, there is no evidence that the Type A person ever accomplishes more than the Type B. Its really a matter of our outlook and attitude toward life as a whole. The Type B person fits in with the over-all flow of life. He or she is more in harmony within themselves and with events outside.

Jesus Christ was Type B in the way he lived and in what he taught. At the beginning of his ministry as he faced his most severe temptations, he knew that we do not live by bread alone. He refused to rush around to accomplish tasks just so he could say he had done a lot in a short amount of time.

Jesus took regular time off for worship and prayer; he knew the importance of being alone and of relaxing. He knew that a certain rhythm and discipline is necessary in life. He rarely tried to do several things at one time.

That Jesus could relax is seen by the fact that while sleeping in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, a storm came up and he would've slept right through it, except that his disciples panicked and aroused him from his sleep.

Jesus had no problem taking time out to eat a meal with a sinner like Zaccheaus, while most of those around him wondered why he was wasting his time with such a useless person.

Jesus could take time out for children. His disciples, on the other hand thought that too was a waste of time. They wanted him to hurry on to what they thought were more important things.

Jesus also taught Type B living. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." In other words, Blessed are those who are humble and patient. Your life will be much happier and you will live longer.

Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing. . . .Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day.

In another place, Jesus told a parable about a Type A person and what the consequences of such behavior are. "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops.' And he said, 'I will do this; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my goods. And then I will say to myself, Soul, you have

ample goods laid up for many years, now you can take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! this night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The man probably had a heart attack and died. All of his life had been hurry, hurry, hurry, to get more and more. One day in the future, he kept telling himself, he would slow down and relax. But it was not to be!

Can a person change from Type A to Type B. Yes, a person can change. Our Christian faith calls it "being born again!" It's a matter of seeing all of life in a new way.

But how does one change from Type A to Type B. First and foremost it means making a commitment -to more sensible living. Nothing contributes so much to better health generally as individual self care in the form of wiser living. Too often we have simply believed that more doctors and hospitals, more and more expensive machines for diagnosis and treatment, and new drugs and vaccines will effect good health over all. They are important certainly, but not nearly as important as self-imposed changes in the way we human beings live.

Things like cancer and heart disease are not "caught" like a cold. Instead they usually arise after decades of abuse of the body and spirit. Years of heavy drinking or smoking, bad diets, obesity, lack of exercise and lives filled with hurry, hurry, hurry and the obsession to work harder and harder in order to hoard more and more things are the real problems we face.

We Americans in particular have come to look on gluttony, alcoholic intemperance, reckless driving, frenzied living as constitutional rights and then we expect government financed cures for all the unhappy consequences. More doctors, greater use of high-cost, hospital-based technologies will not improve the over-all health of our nation.

2. As part of this wiser living, we need to learn to relax completely when it's time to relax. You should know this about the origin of most techniques for relaxation; they are modern adaptions of the beginning steps in the world's great spiritual systems. The right kind of relaxation can be an important step in spiritual growth and can be a part in helping us to be Type B persons like Jesus Christ.

But of course mere technique is not enough, nor is the regular practice of meditation or relaxation enough. It has to be the first step into changing one's whole way of living and one's values and character. If you learn merely to cope with stress and tension, if you train yourself merely to manage anxiety and nervousness, you've done only half the job.

Furthermore if you learn to relax without a change in values, without "being born again," there is a real danger you will also relax your conscience. Then you may find yourself more at eace, more efficient, more energetic at doing to others the very things that once gave you such distress. If you were a slave-driving boss, you might become a worse slavedriver.

Thus churches like this one have a key role, one as important as the medical profession for helping improve the over-all heath of persons. Churches have been doing it all along, but there's more that could be done. A few years ago, one of the physicians in our congregation give me a copy of a report from Johns Hopkins University which showed the relationship between church attendance and over-all health. The study showed that regular and frequent church attenders had less tuberculosis and men in particular had less arteriosclerotic heart disease, less emphysema, less cirrhosis and less suicide than infrequent church attenders.

In the coming months and years, this church will offer several programs designed to help improve the over-all health of individuals and designed to change many of us into Type B persons.

The truly Type B person, like Jesus, has an enqanimity, a tranquility, and ease of mind and peace of spirit in the face of circumstances that ~~more~~ most others would be extremely stressful, if not overwhelming. They have discovered the truth of saying, "Let go and let God!" When a sense of the Infinite, the Eternal God, God's Spirit, replaces our usual narrow self-centeredness, there is no longer a mental basis for fear, anger, tension and the hurry sickness. WE know that if God is for us, who can be against us.

* The basic research on "Type A Behavior" and the story behind it is contained in a book entitled, TYPE A BEHAVIOR AND YOUR HEART, by Meyer Friedman, M.D. and Ray H. Rosenman, M.D. published by Fawcett in paperback.