

Chapter 1

Stop Cheating Yourself

The words were not new. I had read them many times before, but now, cozily settled in my study while preparing for a church health-education class for the School of Health at Loma Linda University, the familiar words seemed to stare back at me as though they were complete strangers. I blinked and flipped back the well-worn pages of the classic book *Healthful Living*, which our class was using for a text. This time I must have read half aloud, because it wasn't long until my wife called from the kitchen, "What did you say, dear?"

"Nothing, but I'm struck by the fact that it says here we should teach people the laws of health."

"H'mm," she answered vaguely. "I think we're trying our best to follow them, aren't we?"

I read the words again, this time to myself: "A knowledge of the laws by which health is secured and preserved is of pre-eminent importance.... We should become acquainted with the laws of life, that every action of the human agent may be in perfect harmony with the laws of God." - *Healthful Living*, pp. 18, 19.

Apparently my wife's interest had been piqued, for at that moment she came into the study, wiping her hands absently on a towel as she explained, "I mean, we do drink a lot of water, we sleep with the windows open, we try to get plenty of exercise, and we are watching our diet, eating more natural foods. Aren't these the laws of health?"

"I'm not sure," I answered thoughtfully. "One thing I am sure of is that if I'm going to teach them to my class it's about time I made certain what these laws are - those sharp graduate students are sure to ask me." Taking out pen and paper in order to jot down the laws as I came to them, I turned back to the book. Immediately these words on page 18 caught my attention: "Health, strength, and happiness depend upon immutable laws; but these laws cannot be obeyed where there is no anxiety to become acquainted with them."

That's a good quotation, I thought. I'll have to underline that one so I'll remember to read it to the class. Now let's see if I can find out what these laws really are all about.

Turning the page, I came to these words: "The same law obtains in the spiritual as in the natural world." That was something to think

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about. The same laws apparently apply in both the spiritual and the natural dimensions. That probably would mean in the mental and social, as well. A little below that was another statement: "Every law governing the human machinery is to be considered just as truly divine in origin, in character, and in importance as the word of God. Every careless action, any abuse put upon the wonderful mechanism, by disregarding His specified laws of the human habitation, is a violation of God's law. This law embraces the treatment of the entire being." - Ibid., p. 20. Here is a unified concept of laws that embraces the treatment of the "entire be-mg."

Apparently, then, these natural laws I was looking for involve fundamental, immutable principles that apply across the board - physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. The book referred to them as natural laws, and later I found that they are also called the laws of our being, or the laws of life and health. Apparently, if we understand these terms correctly, they refer to those great principles that fit equally as well in all four dimensions of man's existence.

Excitedly I rushed out to share this discovery with my wife. After reading the quotations to her I commented, "That can't mean rules like 'Never eat between meals.' That's good for physical well-being but it doesn't make much sense when applied to the mental, social, and spiritual facets of life - does it?"

"No, it really doesn't," she agreed. "But I can think of one that does."

"What's that?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, what about the law of exercise? You can apply that across the board to the four dimensions. Obviously, children wouldn't grow unless they exercised or were active. Mental development depends upon mental activity. Social graces improve as we exercise them, and we cannot grow spiritually unless we actively engage in such spiritual exercises as prayer, Bible study, and sharing our faith."

With her words echoing in my mind, I grabbed the book and rushed off to class. I didn't have the list I was sure the students would ask for, but I did have the key to the kind of things that were involved. We would have to make a clear distinction between important health rules such as "Brush your teeth regularly" and the great, basic, universal principles on which the rules are founded.

That morning my class began a research project that lasted the entire four years I taught at the School of Health. They were actively interested in this assignment and seemed to take it seriously. One

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bright fellow who had been a minister for several years came up with a list of seventy “laws of health.” As the class went through his list carefully, they decided that they could condense his seventy down to eight or ten laws. These are made up of universal principles, based on the “nature of things” established by the Creator, and essential to life and health.

I am sure that even this list does not represent the final word, and the way these laws are stated can be more clearly defined. Yet we found that in our community-health-education programs people were able not only to understand easily this basic list of eight natural laws but also to apply them to a variety of life situations; and they found this very helpful. Leading the list and basic to all is the law of cause and effect. The others are:

- The law of activity and growth
- The law of rest and restoration
- The law of balance and regularity
- The law of cleanliness and hygiene
- The law of self-control
- The law of mutual dependence
- The law of positive ideals

When stated in such basic terms they may not seem very interesting or significant, but when studied in more detail they will be found simple to understand and exciting to apply to the problems of living successfully and fully in a world that is becoming increasingly complex and difficult. Here are eight great dynamic secrets that can be applied to almost any situation to help us discover what is the best thing to do and say and think so that life will be more meaningful, happy, and healthy.

“Laws” Given a Bad Press

Maybe you’ve already been turned off by the use of the term laws. We live in an age when a lot of people think of laws as being unnecessarily restrictive. I’ve even had people say to me, “Don’t teach me any more of those things; I’ve already learned more than I can keep up with. I’ll just try to get by with what I know.”

Such an attitude reminds me of the time my family and I were blissfully driving along a narrow two-way road in the suburbs northeast of Tokyo, Japan. I was sure that the speed limit in that section was 50 kilometers per hour, and since we were comfortably within that limit, it

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came as a shock to be caught suddenly in a flurry of policemen alongside the road. Whistles blew, and officers waved me to the curb.

As best they could the policemen let me know that I was breaking the speed limit. They patiently explained that the sanctioned travel rate in that section was only 35 kilometers per hour. After my protestations that I hadn't understood that fact and a round of Sumimasen's ("So sorry, please"), they let me go with a warning that if I ever came that way again, I must conform to the posted speed limit.

Actually, I was fortunate to get away with breaking the motor-vehicle code without having to pay a fine. Ignorance is no excuse, and good intentions do not ordinarily free us from the consequences of violating the law. Particularly is this true when we deal with the great principles that govern life and health.

But wait a moment. Why should we want to break these laws at all? What perverse quirk of mind would cause us to think that it is fun to try to get away with blatant disregard of those regulations established for the well-being of both body and soul?

Think of the terrible cost involved. I was shocked the other day to learn of the unexpected death of a good friend who had been my major professor in graduate school. My mind went back to my dissertation, which was based on research being done in the field of health education. One area we were working on particularly was that of motivation. This professor challenged me to develop a conceptual model that would help predict health-behavior change.

We were using smoking cessation to illustrate the model. The professor, although an incessant chain smoker himself, became keenly interested in this project. He made several suggestions that greatly strengthened the model I was developing. His enthusiasm got to me, and I was emboldened to ask him why it was that, while he seemed to understand so clearly the reasons for stopping smoking, he continued to puff away.

"Oh, I enjoy it," he said. "I know it doesn't do me any good; in fact, that it's detrimental to my health. But I really enjoy it and don't want to quit." That was the first of several conversations in which we earnestly discussed his smoking habit.

For about two years I had been out of touch with him. Then the other day a person who had recently graduated from the same school was talking with me. When I asked him about my professor friend he replied, "Oh, hadn't you heard that he died? It was a tragedy - he was only 45. He died of lung cancer."

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What a terrible price to pay for clinging to a death-dealing habit just because he enjoyed it so much! Yet, whether we realize it or not, most of us are in the same boat. We are continually violating the laws of life and health in some way or other, probably only vaguely aware that what we're doing is harmful.

Of course we enjoy it. We wouldn't be doing what we're doing unless we did. Yet whom are we hurting? Mainly ourselves.

It may seem like fun to get away with doing those things we enjoy so much; in fact, if we're aware that we're breaking a law it may add a little excitement and the thrill that comes with being a daredevil. But inevitably our fate catches up with us. A law of life isn't a law if we can forever break it with impunity. In the long run comes the day of reckoning - and the awful realization that the one we've cheated the most is self.

Yet everything said so far emphasizes the negative side of the health-law coin. There's a brighter side. Let's look at that.

Can you recall those days when you really felt alive? You had the whole world by the tail, and eagerly looked forward to wading into the challenges of that particularly glorious day. A sense of well-being made you feel that it was truly great to be part of what was happening.

How would you like to feel that way most of the time? The point is - you can! By cooperating with the laws of life and health and actively putting them to work for you, you will find renewed vim, vigor, and joie de vivre that you may have thought you'd never experience again.

It works. These aren't just empty promises. I've been amazed to see how it really works. During the past few years I've taught these principles to group after group, and yet I never get over the surprise at the remarkable changes and the consequent excitement of those who put them to use in a practical way.

I've seen them work in my own life, too - and I'm hooked. Hooked on better living!

That's why I can so confidently say that if you haven't yet learned to live in harmony with the laws of life and health you're cheating yourself - robbing yourself of the happy, abundant way of life that can be yours if you'll just begin to take them seriously.

A few months ago I bought a new car. It's silver-gray with a red vinyl top. I'm happy with this new car, particularly since my previous one was a real lemon.

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This car is mine; I can do anything I want with it. I can wreck it or let it rust or even fill the gas tank with sand if I wish. No one can stop me. It's mine.

But guess what? I'm being very careful with it. In fact, I just took it in for the 5,000-mile checkup, even though it has only 4,700 miles on it. Why? It's quite an investment for one who has to watch his budget, and I want it to last as long as possible.

There's an owner's manual in the glove compartment. Recently I went through it carefully again, just to make sure that I'm doing everything right.

If we do that with our cars, what about the wonderful machine called the human body? If something goes wrong with a car we can trade it in on a new one. Obviously, we can't do so with these amazing body machines. They're basically ours to treat in whatever way we choose. We can neglect them, use them up quickly, and suffer the consequences. Or we can consult the manual provided by the Creator and do everything we can to keep them in shape.

The choice is ours.