

## A Word from Mack

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Our battle is the moral equivalent of war

Last night, while cleaning my study at home, I found them. I thought I had either thrown them away or buried them in a “logical” place which you can never find again! But I thought they were gone. Then, I opened a drawer, and underneath a sheath of papers there they were. I had recovered the rubber band wrapped stack of 121, four-by-six index cards, which spelled out the strategy for community renewal to start and grow safe and caring cities.

It may not sound like much, but when I unwound the rubber band and then began to read each card, methodically turning to the next one and the next, I was carried back 17 years. IN an instant, my study turned into our deck outside the kitchen window. And on a crisp autumn day, with pecan leaves falling all around pungent with green turning to rust, I was alone, and being hammered by unanswerable questions.

“How can we save our cities?” “How can we grow new generations of human beings dedicated to the great causes good, and equity, and safety, and love?” “Where in the world do we start?” All I could think about was our naïve neighborhood kids over on East Fairview when we would break open the old mercury-laden thermometers and play with the quicksilver trying to grasp the infinite slickness in our fingers, all silly in our ignorance of the poisonous toxicity we were handling. “What can we do in the face of such massive dysfunction, so menacing and growing day by day?”

On that fall day, from the transcendent Beyond we call “Insight,” the answer came as clearly as I write these words to you. In 1901 and 1902, William James, the university heralded professor of psychology and philosophy at Harvard University, delivered his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh which were titled, The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature.

James clearly articulated the common dilemma of man: We are in a titanic struggle of good over evil, of darkness over light, of symmetry against dissonance, of justice against might. To triumph, we must develop the **moral equivalent to war**.

We are in a real war. And we must fight this fight with a real army. And we must win. Of course! And now the integrating matrix we call our minds went to work. As a hobby I had studied the strategy of the classic war experts. From Sun Tzu, to Alexander, to the Roman Vegetius, Marshal Maurice de Saxe, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Von Clausewitz, and Lee, to the insurgency tactics of rebellions which succeeded despite all odds. (A strange hobby for a preacher? But the Bible is filled with analogous truths of military discipline, soldiers, armies, and campaigns. See especially in the New Testament refereneces.)

So on 121 index cards, the strategy was set down. I arranged them on the floor of my study and then brought my friends in to walk through the plan. (As a matter of fact, our first offices in the Highland Center were even called by design, “The Strategy Center.”)

To win any war you must have the following seven elements. Six won't do. 1) You must have a simple and clear definition of victory. We are here to partner with God and each other in making our world a home where every single child is safe and loved. 2) You must have a simple strategy for achieving victory. We will use the “We Care Team,” “Haven House” block leaders and Friendship House outreach to restore the relational foundation upon which our cities rest. 3) You must have logical tactics to fulfill the strategy. We have a professional and volunteer group to recruit and unleash the caring army. 4) You must have soldiers trained to take the tactical steps. 5) The soldiers must be committed to sacrifice for victory. 6) The army must have adequate weaponry. The Love of God which demolishes strongholds. 7) You must have support of the home front.

I read those 121 cards now and I am filled with wonder. How far we have come together. I am certain of our victory! God bless each one of you for your part in this. The moral equivalent to war.