

A GUIDEPOSTS OUTREACH PUBLICATION

The Rewards of Positive Living

BY
NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

About the author . . .

Norman Vincent Peale, often called the “minister-to-millions,” was senior minister at the historic Marble Collegiate Church in New York City for 52 years.

Dr. Peale and his wife, Ruth Stafford Peale, founded Guideposts in 1945, an interfaith ministry dedicated to helping people from all walks of life achieve their personal and spiritual potential. Previously, in 1940, they founded Peale Center for Christian Living, which is dedicated to continuing Dr. Peale’s legacy of positive thinking and faith. In 1995, the two organizations merged and Peale Center is now the Outreach Division of Guideposts.

Dr. Peale wrote 46 books, including the classic best-seller, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which has demonstrated that a change in a person’s attitude will change his or her life.

Throughout his life, Dr. Peale emphasized the individual’s ability to overcome life’s problems and seize its opportunities, through faith in God and belief in oneself. He proved this in his own life. Although he was a minister of the Gospel, and believed in God, he didn’t always believe in himself.

As he matured from a shy boy into manhood, his faith led him to the conviction that God had placed a portion of His power in all of us. He reasoned that if this was the case, then each of us was capable of doing great things, so he wholeheartedly embraced the Bible as an infallible guide for creative living. This was Dr. Peale’s message: If you believe that the power of God within you is equal to any of life’s difficulties, then a rewarding life will be yours.

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INTRODUCTION

As a pastor, I have personally seen innumerable victories over every kind and manner of defeat and difficulty; so much so, that I believe nothing is so devastating that by faith we cannot surmount it.

I have selected a few such experiences out of a vast store of human situations, with the hope that you may be able to identify personally with one or more of the stories recorded here.

Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved. But, the situations are real and the solutions to the problems outlined actually worked out as described.

Why do I believe the human experiences related here may be helpful to you?

Because the principles of thought and action taught by our great Teacher, Jesus Christ, may be applied successfully to all forms of human problems. So, if your problem and its solution do not seem to correspond exactly with any of those mentioned herein, simply relate the principle of truth suggested in these circumstances to your own particular situation. You can be sure that God, who loves you, will respond to your prayers and, through our Lord Jesus Christ, grant you mercy, healing and victory.

Norman Vincent Peale

1

What is Positive Living?

HENRY, a longtime junior executive of a large corporation, was laid off. He was one of several hundred to receive such notification.

Henry went home in shock. How he hated to tell his wife! But after dinner, during which he thinly concealed his upset feelings, he and his wife went for a walk down the tree-shaded street on which they had lived in secure happiness for so many years.

Henry broke the news to Margaret. She listened without any sign of being disturbed. She certainly exhibited no panic. Quite calmly she said, "You have always been a good man, Henry, and you have served your company well. Now the company is in grave trouble, and we just have to bear our part.

"And we can do that, too, because you and I, with God's help, have always taken a positive attitude toward our problems. There has never been a time when the Lord hasn't taken care of us and brought things out right."

Henry took his wife's hand. "You are stronger than I am, Honey. I guess I will start at once to add up my

assets, the things I have going for me. And do you know what will head the list of my assets?”

“What?” she asked.

“You,” he replied. “You and God.”

She put her arm through his and, under a silvery moon, they walked back to the home they had built with a lot of struggle. And, when they said their prayers that night, they each, out loud, thanked God that He was already helping them with this new problem. And they went to sleep with the confident knowledge that a way could be made where there seemed no way.

What Steps Were Taken

The next morning, after breakfast, Henry and Margaret had a spiritual quiet time. They read some favorite and sustaining Bible passages. They asked God what to do next. They asked Him to guide them. Then they sat quietly waiting for guidance to come.

After a long silence, Margaret said, “An idea just popped into my head. On a sheet of paper let’s make two columns: *Our Problem, Our Assets*. Under *Our Problem* put down: One, Henry has been laid off. Two, neither of us is as young as we once were.

“Three.” She hesitated. “Well, I can’t think of number three. So let’s go to the other column.

“*Our Assets*: One, we have each other. Two, while we are not as young as we once were, we still have a lot of good years ahead. Three, Henry has a great deal of experience in business methods. He is a good manager. Four, Henry has talent that somebody needs.”

The Practice of Imaging

Another step that these two spiritually “with-it” people employed was that of visualization or imaging.

“This layoff gives us an opportunity to do something different in our lives,” they reasoned. If Henry had not been laid off, they would never have had the courage to consider this. But, as they looked positively at the situation, it could be an opportunity.

“Oh, I’ve thought of something,” said Margaret. “Remember Harry Davega? He was in the sporting goods business and, while he was doing all right, he never felt fulfilled.”

“Yes, I remember,” said her husband. “Davega went to a counselor who explored his talents and abilities and came up with the startling information that he was cut out for the restaurant business.

“Surprised though he was, Davega and his wife Dorothy became intrigued, so much so that they developed one of the finest groups of restaurants ever in the New York area, called *The White Turkey*. They continued successfully in this business until they retired. It’s a great story,” admitted Henry, “but I can’t see myself in the restaurant business.”

“Oh no,” agreed Margaret, “but out there is your thing that you can do superbly. Let’s find it.”

The New Job Emerges

Without any preconceived ideas, this creative couple asked God to reveal what He wanted for them. Gradually, out of their consciousness, the idea began

to emerge, until the focus on it was clear.

They seemed to get the picture almost simultaneously. Grabbing Henry's hand, Margaret said, "Come with me," and she literally pulled him down to the basement. There was his workbench, his tools and equipment, all neatly laid out and immaculately kept.

"Henry, you like to work with your hands. Here is your chance. The picture I see is to build up a "do-it yourself" business. You can teach others how to make things they will be proud of. Just think what a thrill people would get in being able to make their own repairs—and the money they would save!"

"Thank you, dear Lord," said Henry. "You have answered our prayer." He turned to Margaret and said, "Isn't it exciting? God is so obvious. He comes up with simple solutions!"

The Excitement Grows

After another session of prayer it was now clear what they wanted to do, and they asked the Lord to tell them how to do it. And He did.

"I've got it," said Henry. "Let's invite in some of our friends and tell them of this new business we are going into. Admit that we wish we could do work for free and we don't want them to buy our service unless they are really sold. Anyway, let's feel them out."

When they explained the plan to their friends, they responded enthusiastically. Jim said, "I have been trying to make a screen door, but it is no good."

Fred said, "Me too, Jim. But I have been trying to

put together a homemade slide for the kids, and I need some help.” So it went.

The day came when Henry had a nice little shop downtown. Margaret found she had some talent along this line, too. So they worked together. They didn't get rich. But they made a living. And they made a life, too, for they learned that God will help anyone who trusts Him to enter into positive living.

This attractive Henry and Margaret could be anybody: Bill and Mary, Fred and Janet, or whoever. The point of such a story is that the true believer never needs to be defeated. Always, he or she, or they together, can receive guidance from God that will lead them out of their trouble into creative positive living.

Action Steps for Turning Defeats Into Positive Living

- 1.** Whenever a seemingly defeatist situation develops, always add up your assets, big and small. Chances are, they will outbalance the debits.
- 2.** Read the Bible and pray, and out of the spiritual attitude thus created, practical insights will emerge.
- 3.** Learn to practice visualization and imaging. That which is deeply imaged or pictured in consciousness tends to reproduce itself in fact.
- 4.** Prayerfully and objectively think of ways to improve yourself and your life situation.
- 5.** The true believer never needs to be defeated. Always will come guidance from God to lead away from defeat to the rewards of positive living.

2

Positive Living Begins With Positive Attitudes

THE ATTITUDE of an individual toward life will pretty well determine what that life will become. The important thing, really, is not what may happen to you, but rather it is the attitude you take toward what happens to you. One's attitude toward happenings can bring about defeat and unhappiness. On the other hand, another type of attitude toward precisely the same events can result in favorable outcomes, in success and happiness.

For example, let us say that two people of equal ability, training, and education are confronted suddenly by a set of circumstances that represent a most difficult situation. The attitude of one of these two persons is that this is an overwhelming problem, that really there is nothing that can be done about it. The individual admits inability to deal with the matter in any constructive way.

As a result, the set of circumstances becomes bigger and bigger and the power of the individual more and more minimized. Such an attitude can hardly bring any other outcome than defeat and failure.

Another Attitude Brings Good Results

The other individual, facing precisely the same set of circumstances, refuses to be terrified. He remains calm, permitting common sense to prevail. This person might say, “Yes, this is a tough situation, but I am tougher than it is.” He reasons, “If I think without panic, my brain will produce ways to deal with this situation effectively.”

Chances are that such an attitude will produce positive results, and if this attitude continues in the sequence of problems of which our days are made up, the total result will be positive living.

How a Positive Attitude Affects Health

I once knew a man who lived to be just a few weeks short of ninety years. He was a rugged, healthy, dynamic, positive person who built up a sizable business. As a young boy, he was frail and weak. His family accepted that he wouldn't live long, and the boy came to embrace that attitude toward himself.

But he had a teacher in school who was a health fanatic. “You can be as healthy as you see yourself being,” the teacher thundered at the lad. “Change your attitude toward yourself and your health. You can be the strongest boy in this school, and outlive everyone else,” was the dynamic promise.

The boy, instead of being negative toward his physical condition, became positive. He visualized himself as strong, tough, and healthy: good stomach, good lungs, sturdy legs, clear mind. And when he died just short of ninety, he had indeed outlived all his classmates.

This same healthy old man had a salesman working for him who wasn't doing very well. One day, of his own accord, the man came in to see his employer. "Sir," he said, "I am going to resign. I am doing a poor job for you and I am ashamed. The trouble is, I was never cut out to be a salesman. I am a failure."

Self-Depreciating Attitude Changed

Our old friend leaped to his feet and said, "Get this straight. I selected you as a salesman and I don't make mistakes in people. Even if you don't believe in yourself, I do. Your problem is a depreciating attitude toward yourself. Change that! See yourself as a child of Almighty God. See yourself, with God's help, the greatest salesman this company ever had.

"Now," he continued, "I'm giving you a dare. I dare you to go out tomorrow and bring in more orders than any other salesman. You get the right attitude and you will get the right results."

The weak-kneed salesman went out of that office, fired up. He reversed his attitude toward himself. He was top man in orders the next day and, in time, became the leading salesman in the organization.

A good friend of mine, Zig Ziglar, says, “It isn’t aptitude but attitude that gives you amplitude.” And how right he is.

Speaking of salespeople, here’s an interesting story of a woman who was preoccupied with her own success. She called on people not with the basic idea of helping them, but fearfully hoping that she could make a sale and thus help herself.

There is a strange reaction among human beings that when a person is self-centered others are apt to pick this up. In this case, she made such a poor impression that people did not buy from her to the extent her company required.

Miracle of Love Attitude

The boss called her in and talked about her performance. He said, “Mary, I know you have lots of ability. But you are thinking too much about yourself I suggest that you do some praying about that and ask the Lord to help you forget yourself.

“And here is what I want you to do. Monday morning, you start out on the round of your customers but leave your order book at home. For one week, don’t take any orders. Instead, just tell your customers you want to get acquainted. Ask about their families, their children. Just be friendly, caring, and loving. And find out how nice these people are and how much they need you and the merchandise you sell.”

It worked. Not all at once. Things or people seldom change overnight. But the woman became a leader

when her attitude changed from being centered on herself to projecting service to others.

I have used these stories about salespeople because they seem to illustrate so well the power of attitude in conditioning life. But every individual can very well ask himself or herself, “How does my attitude toward myself, toward other people, affect my life?” Never forget that positive attitudes develop positive living.

Some Guides To Achieving a Positive Attitude

- 1.** What happens to you is not as important as your attitude toward what happens.
- 2.** You are tougher than any tough problem.
- 3.** Reject the thought of weakness; think strength.
- 4.** Never depreciate yourself nor affirm self limitation.
- 5.** Use the powerful attitude of goodwill.

3

Faith: The Key to Positive Living

IF A PERSON has faith, that individual will have the secret of positive living. The truth of that statement is verified by the Bible: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (*Matthew 17:20*). This is a tremendous spiritual and practical promise, and that it works out in personal experience is indisputable.

I once knew a man who had great faith, so much so that he gained almost incredible victories. Smilingly, he told me that he had a secret that gave him this strength. The first thing every morning, upon awakening, he would say aloud: “I believe; I believe; I believe.” Then he would arise and live a life of faith all day long. Over many years, I have suggested this technique to scores of troubled persons and it has turned their lives around to lives of positive living.

Faith is basic to positive living because, when it dominates the mind, it stimulates creative insights and new ideas. A number of years ago, during a deep

recession, the small business a man had built up went to the wall. Seemingly he was unable to get a job and he sat at home in black discouragement. Fortunately, he had a wife who was a great believer, a real practitioner of faith.

“Don’t you feel so discouraged,” she said to her husband. “There is a way and God will show us the way.”

Faith and Potholders

This woman was very creative with her hands and could skillfully make all sorts of interesting items. It so happened that I was giving a talk in their city and was asked by this woman’s uncle to call upon them. The husband dolefully recounted their miseries. But the wife carried on a sprightly conversation, saying, “God will show us the way.”

I noticed that she was working on a brightly colored piece of material that looked like a mitten, and I asked her what it was. “Oh, it is just a potholder dressed up,” she replied.

An idea popped into my mind, put there by God answering the woman’s faith. “Why don’t you send Bill down to the ten-cent store?” I suggested. (You could buy things for ten cents in those days.) “I think they would buy them. At least it is worth trying.”

Reluctantly, Bill went down to see the buyer and, to his surprise, got an order for a gross of them. That simple thing started a new business that ultimately employed quite a few people. “Funny,” said Bill, “how

God answers prayer through potholders.” It created a life of positive living, not only for these two, but for the people they employed.

Faith Releases a Great New Idea

After a Rotary Club meeting in New York City, one of the members said that he would like to talk with me for a moment. “I know that you have faith,” he told me, “and you believe that through faith you can get guidance and insight. Well, I am really up against it. I have a situation in my business and I can’t see my way through it. Will you pray for me, to help me get an answer?”

“Yes, of course I will pray for you,” I replied. And we prayed together.

Then I directed him, “Go back to your office now, close the door, and have a spiritual quiet time. Let your mind get peaceful and say aloud, ‘My mind is open to God’s thoughts. He is hearing me. He is helping me now.’ And then spend a few moments just thinking about God and Jesus.”

I explained that this would make it possible for God to get through to him. Then I suggested that he lay out the entire situation, telling God all the details about it just as he would to a friend. “Then, finally, just thank God for His help. God, you see, is a great listener.”

He reported later that he did this, and nothing seemed to happen except that he had a strong compulsion to take a walk. While this seemed a strange thing in the middle of a business day, the thought occurred

to him that physical exercise might be a part of the answer process. At any rate, he left his office on Madison Avenue, walked over to Park Avenue, briskly walked north ten blocks, then back and down Madison Avenue toward his office. Suddenly it happened.

Just as he was about to cross the street, an idea flashed up in his mind, as clear as a picture, of the action he should take. It was something he had never thought of at all. But in an instant he realized that this was his answer.

Excitedly he telephoned to tell me about it. “God does not always work so quickly,” I told him, “but you love God, you are a man of faith, and your faith puts you in the category of positive living.”

Faith's Enormous Power

Perhaps we do not fully appreciate the enormous power of faith. If we really understood that power we would not let ourselves be defeated by so many things.

Matthew very well understood the type of half-faith that most people have when he recorded these words of Jesus: “According to your faith be it unto you” (*Matthew 9:29*). Little faith gets little results; big faith, big results.

But so great is faith that if the amount you have is like a mustard seed, small but real, nothing shall be impossible. Just put real faith up against life's difficulties, and the result will be for you the joy and victory of positive living.

My friend Harry DeCamp was diagnosed as a terminal case with a mass of cancer behind the gall bladder. He was sent home to die. Harry was a believer, but not a churchgoer; in fact, not even a church member. Day after day, he stared hopelessly into the television screen, awaiting death.

Then a friend sent him a get-well card that said, "Have faith in God." This made him think. Is there really power in faith? he asked himself.

Another friend sent him a copy of *Guideposts* magazine, which told of a woman who had been healed of a problem much the same as his own. Harry began to pray, and his religious ideas were so uncomplicated that he was able to pray with faith-like a child, as the Bible advises.

As a result of his prayers and his faith, an idea came. He began to visualize, or image, the healthy white cells within his body cascading down from his shoulders and doing battle with the unhealthy cells. He says that he did this at least a hundred times a day, praying, believing, imaging.

One day, all of a sudden, he was hungry, whereas he had had no appetite at all. He began to eat heartily. He felt better. After many weeks of this process, his astonished doctors told him that the disease symptoms were no longer in existence.

I asked Harry how this all came about. "Through faith in God, positive faith in God," was his reply. The fact remains that he is today a healthy man, enjoying the rewards of positive living.

Suggestions for Using Positive Faith

1. Affirm faith every day: “I believe, I believe, I believe.”
2. When you are out of ideas, turn to faith. God will supply you with new and better ones.
3. Always remember, God uses your mind to release insights when faith clears away the mental blocks.
4. Practice faith in the Lord, for it is the greatest power for your positive use.
5. Put your life completely in God’s hands; trust and believe always. Miracles can happen. The power of positive living will result.

4

Love: A Positive Factor In Positive Living

THE EFFECT OF LOVE as a factor in positive living cannot be minimized. For it is a maximum force in the development of good, caring human relations. And, good relationships are important to one's own happiness and welfare. Ill will, dislike, and rejection contribute to negative living and are to be avoided if one desires happiness.

Some years ago, a couple came to our church and, while they attended Sunday services regularly, they never were a part of any of the church activities and avoided all social contact. I sensed in both of them a deep unhappiness and, in an effort to help them, called on them frequently. I noticed that their conversation was filled with criticism, recrimination, and a petulant dislike for many people. Obviously, they were living in a self-created atmosphere of ill will.

Many of my messages emphasized the importance of love and outgoingness as a way of life. And so they constantly heard this idea from the pulpit. But I went further and gave them a private treatment on the same subject. And gradually, they came to the point where

they were able to change their attitude of ill will and, instead, take a positive and loving attitude toward people, rather than one of censoriousness and criticism.

As the habit of dislike gave way to a love attitude, an astounding phenomenon occurred. Not only did they become happier in spirit, but various physical conditions of which they complained improved. The husband moved up in his company. His wife also received promotions in her work. They both grew to love their jobs, whereas before they hated them.

Successful Personal Relations

Another effect of the love attitude is what it does to our relationship with people. To live a successful life, one must establish a reciprocal feeling of goodwill with others. If individuals are aware that you do not like them, they in turn will not like you.

If you like people so much that you make them like themselves a bit more, they will not only like you very much, but you will actually be beloved.

In Hollywood, I once knew a famous character actor who had, in his earlier career, been a great favorite on the stage. He loved everybody and everybody loved him. When he came onstage, the audience unconsciously felt uplifted. Actually, it was the projection of his love attitude, as was subsequently made clear.

Then he had a couple of bad experiences with trusted friends who, as he put it, viciously double-crossed him. The venom of resentment deepening into hate invaded his consciousness, drove off the love attitude, and left

him an irascible, vindictive man. On stage he didn't go over so well and, slowly, he lost out and booking agents avoided him. He wandered futilely among them looking for jobs that didn't come.

At this point in his life, he went back to church, one where people believed in and emphasized personal life-changing. He had a personal experience of Christ and gave up the hate, forgave those who had mistreated him, reestablished his relationship with them, and became once again a loving, happy man.

He Sends Out Love Thoughts

He told me that he was given a small part in a play as a kind of tryout. Standing in the wings, he got an idea as he prayed: "Send out love thoughts to the audience. Love each person out there in the name of Christ, for they have come to this play tonight to get away from the cares and troubles of the world." He saw a man sitting on the front seat who looked very dejected. He sent special love thoughts to him.

In the few minutes he was on the stage, he was his old loving self. Slowly but surely, with this renewed love attitude, he moved back up and became once again one of the great actors.

As we talked together, he said, "Have you ever sent out love thoughts to your congregation in your church? Well, I advise that you do that." And I have done it ever since. All this happened over 40 years ago.

The actor and I both discovered a great truth—that the projection of love, genuinely held, leads one into

a state of positive living.

I believe that positive love can restore energy, stimulate better health, and reinvigorate one's vitality. That it has an actual therapeutic effect when consistently practiced, I have no doubt whatsoever. Hate and resentment are attitudes that make for ill health; they send their diabolical virus through first the mind and then the entire physical organism. They can make the organic function of the body lethargic.

Ill Will Made Him Ill

A doctor told me once that he had a patient who wasn't sick and yet he was. He explained that there was no malfunction, but that all the organ's were operating at a low-grade level. And, he added, the man had the foulest breath he had ever experienced.

The doctor gave him every indicated medicinal prescription, but added whimsically, "I didn't get to first base with him until I stopped being a doctor of medicine and became a doctor of the soul. I prescribed the Gospel to him and, though it was a tough job, finally I got the hate out of him. His breath became normal, and he had good health thereafter."

I, myself, once had an experience of the vitality-increasing power of love. I had a sleepless night, which is a rarity for me, and finally gave up trying to sleep at about 4 a.m. I wandered about the house. Finally, I sat down in my reading chair in the library and picked up one magazine and book after another, but none interested me. Then I saw a book on the practice of medi-

tation. A few pages of this were enough. But it gave me an idea, that of fixing my meditation on a definite item, and becoming quiet and letting my thoughts go where they would.

I Discover a Secret of Vitality

Therefore I fixed my eyes on a beautiful eagle carved by a famous wood-carver, which I had purchased once in Switzerland. Naturally to mind came the Scripture passage: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (*Isaiah 40:31*).

This led me to begin praying, with love, for people. I started first with my wife, then each of my children, followed by all my associates in each of our enterprises, naming each one and bringing up each face before me, mentioning a particular need if I knew of it.

By this time, I was beginning to feel strangely happy, and I kept on praying for everyone I could think of. Mentally, I went through the congregation of the church, up and down the aisles, into the choir loft, across the pulpit. Then my mind went to the doorman in our apartment house, the elevator operator, everyone, until I must have prayed for 500 people.

With a start I realized it was 6 a.m. and this was Sunday and I had to be at the church at 8:30 a.m. I was filled with energy and delight; and I was hungry, ravenously so. I awakened my wife, "I want a big breakfast, bacon and eggs and the works!"

I preached a sermon, personally greeted hundreds of people, made another talk in the afternoon, had an interview, did some work in my office and, at 11 p.m., was still going strong and hated to go to bed.

It was all accounted for by a love injection in the mind, an outgoingness, a powerful application of the therapy of love. If one would endeavor always to maintain the love attitude, that person would have in full measure the joy of positive living.

Some Steps in the Love Process

- 1.** Deliberately practice the elimination of ill will, rejection, hate, and mean criticism from your conversation and from your thoughts and attitudes. Become healthy-minded and positive-minded.
- 2.** Cultivate the ability to like people sincerely in your thoughts; show such liking by action and projection of attitude. Result: People will like you.
- 3.** Send out love thoughts into all tense and contentious situations and to people who are rude, insensitive, and antagonistic. Demonstrate that love has an amazing power to melt ill will as the sun melts ice.
- 4.** If you do not feel up to par physically, remember that the Creator can also recreate, and He often does so by the therapy of love.
- 5.** Pray for as many people by name as you can, every day. Include them in your caring thoughts. Pour yourself out and God will pour Himself in. Joy and the rewards of positive living will result.

5

Positive Problem Solving And Positive Living

A POSITIVE ATTITUDE toward the solving of problems is a vital part of positive living. Everyone has to deal with the factor in human life that we call a problem. We might perhaps wish that these problems were not so many—or so difficult. But God made life the way it is, with problems from youth to old age. And therefore, since He does all things well, problems must be good for us. They must be of value in the development of personality.

Some wise people I have known have taken a positive attitude toward problems and have integrated them creatively into their life experience. For example, the late J.C. Penney was a close friend of mine for many years. At the last, I conducted his funeral service when he passed away at age 96. One time, I was sitting with him at the head table at a Rotary Club Convention where we were both participants on the program.

J.C. Penney's Secret

Always on the lookout for wise comments having to do with successful living, I said to him, “J.C., in one

sentence of as few words as possible, tell me the secret of your success in life, both as a businessman and an outstanding Christian.”

Without hesitation he replied, “Here’s the answer in four words, ‘Adversity and Jesus Christ.’”

Mr. Penney explained that he was the son of an impoverished preacher in the hills of Missouri. When his father died, the only will he left to his son was: “I bequeath you some honest debts, manly character, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” With that as a start, and a continuing faith and a multitude of problems along with it, J.C. proved to be a genius at positive problem solving and positive living.

While I have no intention of eulogizing problems and am very sympathetic with every reader who has problems that may seem insurmountable, still I have to say that problems are not without value. For one thing, they contain much know-how. They line the pathway to true wisdom; they make people strong.

Every problem you will ever face contains a creative center, a central core of great value; and it is the part of good judgment always to listen to what a problem has to say to you, for it may contain the greatest guidance you will ever have.

Congratulations on Your Problem

I recall a time when an organization for which I had considerable responsibility was having a seemingly endless run of problems. And then along came a particularly knotty problem, one that seemed to threaten

the existence of the organization. I was president at the time and decided to telephone the chairman of the board of directors, a well-known business executive. When I heard his voice on the wire I said, “We’ve got a problem.” To my astonishment he replied, in a very cheery voice, “Congratulations!”

“But,” I said, a bit taken aback, “this is a tough problem.”

His reply came in the same cheery voice, “Okay. Then double congratulations!” He then explained, “I have discovered that God only gives big problems to those He thinks capable of handling big problems. So what you say only proves that God believes in us. So let’s puff out our chests, for He acclaims us as capable of dealing with tough problems.”

Disadvantage and Advantage

This positive, sensible consideration of a problem immediately lifted my mind from visions of defeat to a belief that we could lick it. This new and positive conviction was further strengthened when my friend offered the following gem of wisdom: “Always remember that every disadvantage contains a corresponding advantage.” He then asked me to outline the problem and suggested that I say a prayer over the telephone asking for guidance, and that we would both think about it and call a meeting within a week or so.

Suffice it to say that we got the answer. We solved the problem. And to me, the experience has been one of my personal mileposts in positive living.

The Two or Three Method

Another important principle in positive problem solving and positive living is the spiritual method that I call the principle of the “two or three.” It is based on two Scripture passages: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven” (*Matthew 18:19*). “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (*Matthew 18:20*).

It would be impossible to say how many times in my own life I have made use of this wonderful principle of the two or three, and have suggested it to others who have used it to good results.

I recall a telephone call a few years ago to my office in Pawling, N.Y., from a woman half a continent away. I did not know her, but she said that she was one of my readers and she was calling me about a problem. She informed me that she was “down to \$162.27 in the bank and \$18 and a few coins in my purse.” Her husband’s small store wasn’t doing well on account of a prolonged strike in her community.

“I am not expecting you to give me any money, for I would not take it. I am calling you to be my partner in the two or three principle that you have written about. I know that, even though you are perhaps 1500 miles from where I am, the Lord is with us both. And I remind you of the Bible passage ‘where any two agree.’ So I am going to pray, and I want you to pray that my husband and I will remain calm, that we will

really have faith, and that our minds will be open to the insights that the Lord wants to give us.”

I was impressed with the deep spiritual wisdom of this woman. I thought how much God must like her. We prayed as suggested. “Now, before you hang up,” I said, “I want you to know that I will continue to pray for you on the basis of the two or three principle, and let us both hold the positive affirmation that the answer is even now in process.”

Three weeks later, she telephoned again. “Praise the Lord,” she said. “We sent letters to people that we had placed on our list of ‘dead accounts.’ I simply told them of our need and how I believed that God would hear our prayer. I added that I knew that they had problems, too, and I would be praying for them.

“We had the most wonderful letters back from a number of these people. And I was touched by the things they said. The amount of money that was paid on those accounts pulled us through the crisis. Isn’t that two or three principle wonderful?”

Affirmation of Good Outcomes

Another principle is that of the affirmation of the desired outcome and the practice of seeing it come to pass, through God’s help. If there is something that you want, pray about it, asking God if it is a right thing. This is so important, for if it isn’t right, it is wrong; and wrong things never turn out to be right.

Being assured spiritually that it is right, hold it firmly in your positive thoughts, work hard for it, never lose

your belief in it, and ways and means will almost miraculously be provided.

One night, years ago, I was scheduled to speak in an upstate New York city. While having dinner in the hotel dining room, a man approached my table asking if he might speak to me. I asked him to take a seat, and he said, "I am the failure brother of an important and well-known man whom you know. We are only two years apart in age, but he has all the brains in the family. He is a great success and I am a great failure."

"Do you have any dreams or goals?" I asked. This was not the question he expected, for it took him back a bit. He expected some sympathy, but I wanted to awaken a positive response.

"Yes, I do have a goal. I have two little girls. They are everything to me. One is seven, the other nine. I want them to be college graduates. But I never made it through college. So how can a man with no more money than I've got ever send them to college?"

"I'll tell you how," I said. "Stop running yourself down and stop being scared. Do you realize that the words scare and scarcity come from the same root? Maybe your fear about yourself and the future is producing the very scarcity of which you complain.

"Here is what you do. Form a picture of two commencement days: one for the nine-year-old girl, one for the seven-year-old girl. Print the details of those commencement days on your mind and 'see' those two little girls walking up to receive not only a diploma, but prizes for excellence in scholarship. As well, have

your wife form the same picture, and every night when you say your prayers thank the Lord that He is giving you and your daughters the wonderful experience of receiving those diplomas.”

His eyes were shining by this time. “I get the idea,” he said. But then a shadow crossed his face. “But where will I ever get the money?”

“If you hold the positive thought about the graduations, you will begin to hold positive thoughts about yourself. You will stop resenting your brother and, once having eliminated all these debilitating negatives, you will find new resources within yourself.”

In due course, I received invitations to two commencement exercises. This man and his family, through positive problem solving, found the secret of positive living.

How Positive Problem-Solving Leads to Positive Living

- 1.** Look for the good value in every problem.
- 2.** Remember J.C. Penney’s four-word secret of success: “Adversity and Jesus Christ.”
- 3.** Always hold the thought that to every disadvantage there is a corresponding advantage.
- 4.** Use the amazing spiritual and practical prayer principle of the “two or three.”
- 5.** As you pray, affirm and believe in good outcomes through God’s grace.
- 6.** Every day, practice the true belief that positive problem solving leads to positive living.



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