

TRIUMPH



Over Life's Toughest Problems

A Guideposts Outreach Publication
From the writings of **Norman Vincent Peale**

GUIDEPOSTS OUTREACH

Guideposts, founded by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and his wife, Ruth Stafford Peale, in 1945, is a nonprofit interfaith ministry dedicated to helping people from all walks of life achieve their maximum personal and spiritual potential. Its inspirational products and programs spring from two major beliefs: that true stories are a powerful way to motivate people to lead better lives and that faith in God can be strengthened by applying spiritual truths to daily life.

Guideposts Outreach strives to fulfill our mission by providing inspirational publications free of charge to hospitals, nursing homes, churches, military personnel, correctional facilities and other organizations that serve the public. In addition, we invite our readers to send us their prayer requests—by mail, by phone or via the Internet. Every working day, Guideposts staff and volunteers pray for those requests by name and need.

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TRIUMPH OVER LIFE'S TOUGHEST PROBLEMS

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INTRODUCTION: STRENGTH & FAITH

Life can be hard. Not always—people fall in love, have children, celebrate birthdays, take trips and sit on the porch on summer evenings, listening to the crickets. But inevitably, and to everyone, trouble comes. Relationships flounder. Jobs are lost. Money gets tight. Kids rebel. And through it all, even in the midst of friends and family, loneliness can seem like all there is.

When life turns tough, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Resources that once sustained you—relationships, self-confidence, work and material possessions—appear powerless. Indeed, they may be your problem, making it harder, not easier, to find a way out. At such times, you imagine people saying, “Why can't she get it together?” “I always told him he should....” You long for an instant fix, something to take your problems away. Compassion

is all well and good. But you need solutions.

That's what this booklet is for. Not to give you an instant fix—unfortunately, one doesn't exist—but to lay out practical steps you can take to tackle some of life's most debilitating problems. In fact, just by opening this booklet, you have taken the first and most important of those steps—making yourself part of the solution. When you decide to confront your problems, you engage those powerful, God-given instruments—your mind and spirit—in the struggle. And with those awake, there is very little you can't accomplish.

Why? Because faith and hard work aim you toward the resolution of all problems—God. Read this book and you will find yourself changed. Not free from trouble, but strong and faithful enough to tackle any problem that comes your way.

DEPRESSION: A NEW VIEW



People who are depressed feel alone and powerless. They feel the depression is their fault. “I’m worthless,” they think. “I can’t do anything right.” Life gapes like a black hole. The depression blots out everything else.

Here is another way to think about depression, however—as the least, not the most, important thing about you. Depression only seems to dominate your life. In fact, it is merely a combination of brain chemistry and personal experience conspiring to make life appear far bleaker than it actually is.

If you are depressed, if depression is blocking your life or driving you to feelings of despair, the first thing you must do is seek professional help. Doctors and counselors can determine what kinds of assistance you need and set you on a solid path of recovery.

As you wrestle with depression, however, there are two practical steps which, no matter your course of treatment, can help immeasurably to transform a life that seems lost into one eminently worth living.

First, remember that, even when you feel most alone, God is with you, ready to enter into and heal your suffering. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit,” says Psalm 34. That is not wishful thinking. God so loved this suffering world that he sent his son Jesus to suffer right alongside it. Think about that—God knows your agony because he has experienced it himself.

Second, no matter how downcast you feel, take a moment to write down as many blessings in your life as you can think of. The first, of course, is life itself. Then there are your memo-

ries, at least some of which are happy—what an incalculably rich resource! What about books you love? Pets? Friends? Family? In each of these there is at least a measure of good, and one of the most important things you can do while depressed is to train yourself to find the good, even the speck of good, in each day you live.

This is a discipline, of thankfulness and ultimately of hope, that can go a long way toward easing depression. It can take you out of yourself and remind you that, in comparison to the solidity of love and generosity, your depression is merely a veil waiting to be torn away.



LONELY NO MORE

If you are feeling lonely, you are, ironically, not alone. Nearly everyone experiences loneliness in their life. At this moment, around the world, many people are wrestling with feelings exactly like yours. How could they not? Human beings are complicated, and bringing them together in healthy, sustaining relationships takes time and work. You may not have found those relationships yet. But you will.

How? Start by listing some skills you have. Maybe you like to cook. Or quilt. Or draw, or write, or balance a checkbook or merely sit with someone and watch a movie. Well, guess what? There are places you could be doing those things with others right now.

Your local church could certainly use your help preparing food for coffee hour or a potluck supper. No doubt there is a quilting circle in

your town. Your local library probably sponsors a literacy program that would love your volunteer labor. And there are many people in nursing homes who would like nothing better than a nice person like you to come along offering to sit and chat with them, or watch a movie.

If you approach loneliness that way—as something you could help others feel less of—you’ll find your own loneliness ebbing away. As Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, “Wherever two or three come together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” That means two things—that God delights in whatever company you offer others, and that he is always offering you his own. In that sense, the greatest truth about loneliness is that, in a way, it doesn’t exist. How could it, when God is always with us?

CONTROL YOUR ANGER



Life these days can make anyone angry. People work long hours, then commute through terrible traffic to households in disarray. Even seemingly easy lives—good-paying jobs, happy families—pull people in too many directions. Merely getting kids to sports games, or surviving change in a fast-paced world, can leave the most energetic person worn out and frayed.

How do you respond to life? Calmly? Or, like many people, with anger? Anger, unfortunately, is an all-too-common problem. Parents yell at children. Employees seethe and undermine each other. Drivers curse and cut each other off.

If anger impairs your life, the first step toward a solution is admitting you have a problem. Yelling, cursing, hitting, flying off the handle—none of these is an appropriate or constructive way to deal with life. Almost always, they deepen

whatever fix you're in. Angry words wound, and some wounds never heal.

Once you admit you are prone to anger, you need to develop strategies to calm and, ultimately, redirect it. First, appeal directly to God for help. When you feel anger coming on, pray, "God, right now, I need your peace. Please soothe my mind. I feel you replacing my anger with patience. I thank you for this gift of quiet." At the beginning of each day, invite Jesus to walk with you, keeping a watchful eye over your emotions: "Let your restraining, healing hand be upon me today, Lord. Help me to meet every situation calmly and with control."

Next, remember that you can almost never change people—or situations beyond your control, such as traffic or weather delays. What you can change is your attitude. Instead of

focusing on what is annoying or difficult or harmful, look for the good. Delayed? More time to read. Stuck in traffic? Find good music on the radio. Irked by a colleague? Remember, that person is a human being, confronted like you with problems and difficulties that contribute to their bad behavior.

The book of Proverbs says, “A soft answer turns away wrath.” And Jesus commands us to be kind to our enemies. Why? Because the real problem with anger is its ability to take us far away from love and forgiveness. God commands us to love and forgive. Learn those disciplines, and your anger will become a distant memory.



OVERCOME ADDICTION

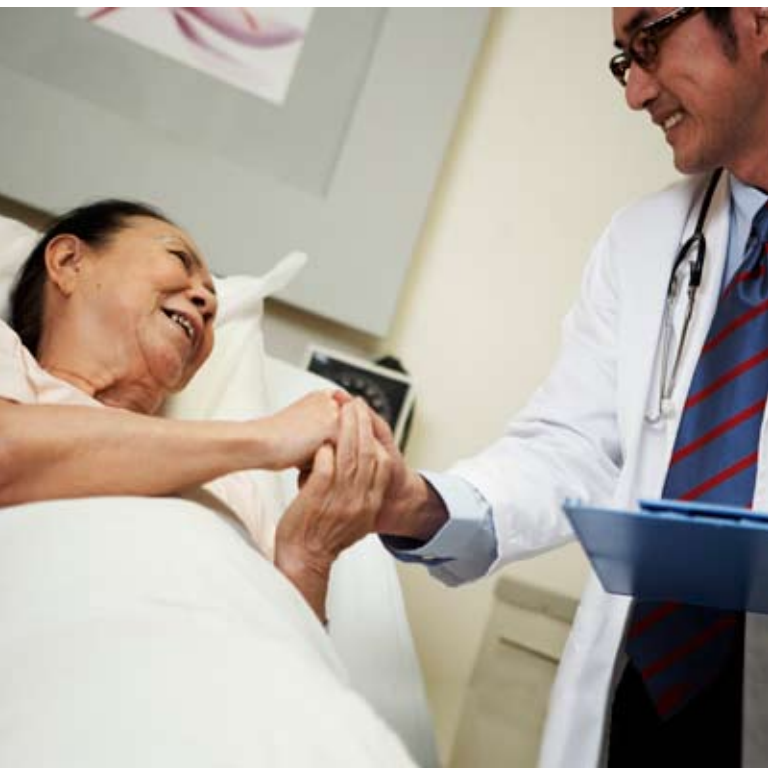
If you struggle with a substance-abuse problem, the first step you must take to overcome it is to admit the problem exists. Until you are willing to acknowledge that you are ruled by alcohol or drugs—that you can not stop your consumption of them—you might as well put this booklet down and move on. For making that admission is likely to be the most difficult, and most courageous, thing you will do as an addict. Only after you have admitted you have a problem can you begin walking the road to recovery.

Half-hearted confession—“maybe I drink too much now and then, but it’s not a problem”—won’t do. You must admit your powerlessness over drugs or alcohol. Then you must seek out Alcoholics Anonymous or another 12-step treatment or counseling program. Such programs have helped millions of addicts before you. They have what you need.

If you are the loved one of an addict, you, too, will likely need to seek help. Not because you have done anything wrong, but because the effect of addiction on loved ones can often be as catastrophic as on addicts themselves. Loved ones frequently blame themselves for an addict's behavior or labor under the illusion that they can help an addict get clean. Both assumptions are false. No one causes an addiction. Addiction is an illness, and only addicts themselves can decide to seek a cure.

Organizations such as Al-Anon exist to help loved ones cope with the effects of addiction. Churches also can be excellent resources. Seek them out, and you will find in them fellowship, support and the advice you need to cope with the addict in your life.

FACE ILLNESS WITH HOPE



The hardest part of being sick, worse even than pain and discomfort, is the realization that you are vulnerable, indeed mortal. Our culture prizes youth—so much that people who get sick can feel there is something wrong with them, that the illness is somehow their fault. Healing is very difficult with that mindset.

Luckily, there is another, life-giving way to think about illness. Rather than dwelling on your fear and sense of exile from normal life, focus outside yourself, on the remarkable, often miraculous healing happening all around you in this world. Everywhere, even as you read this, doctors are treating patients, loved ones are giving care, children are writing get-well cards, and even pets are offering their irreplaceable brand of cuddly affection. None of that can be taken for granted. It is tangible evidence of God at

work in the world, using earthly hands to accomplish his loving, healing purposes.

You can bank on that healing. In fact, you must. For faith in God is key to coping with illness. Not because God only heals those who believe in him, but because a faithful heart is by definition on the road to restoration. When you believe in God's healing power, you put yourself in contact with a vital current of life-giving goodness. That goodness may help heal your body. It will definitely heal your soul, giving you peace and confidence that God is working out all things for good.

How do you tap into that current? First, pray and affirm every day that you are surrounded by God's protective love. Life takes its course, and illness—and ultimately death—can not be escaped. But God promises to be near you always.

In prayer, you take advantage of that promise.

Second, memorize this powerful, reassuring verse from the Gospel of John: “I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly.” This is God’s offer, to give life—everlasting life—to all who sincerely ask for it. Turn your heart toward God and you will find healing more durable than anything you could have imagined.



THRIVE AT WORK

People spend more time at work than anywhere else. And yet, for many people, work is a prime source of stress. What a terrible way to live! Forced every day to trudge off to a place that makes you miserable.

Some people hate work because they find their job unfulfilling. The work is boring, the office drab, co-workers petty or dull. Unfortunately, most of this is beyond your control. What you can control is your attitude. Instead of seeing your job as a demeaning chore, realize that all work, no matter how small, is elevating when done well with a faithful heart. God doesn't promise you a life of fun and riches. He does promise that if you seek him—even at work—you will find him.

One of the best ways to find God—and therefore life—at the office is to invite him there.

Pour out your feelings and frustrations about work every morning in prayer. Then spend five minutes in silence listening for God's counsel—not necessarily in words, but in gradual illumination. On your way to work, ask God to accompany you throughout the day—and believe that he will.

Finally, remember this supreme truth. No matter where you are, no matter what your job, you can serve God and minister to people around you. God cares less about where you work than how you work. Seek to serve others, work to the best of your ability and maintain a faithful, grateful attitude. You will find yourself looking forward to each day—and even inspiring others to follow your lead.

GET OUT OF DEBT



Money problems beset many people in this age of easy credit and conspicuous consumption. If you face crippling debt or find yourself slipping ever further behind financially, you are not alone. The first step to recovering your financial footing is to realize that others have overcome problems like yours by making a few straightforward, though profound, changes to their lives.

The first of these changes is simply taking time out to assess your financial condition comprehensively. Gather your family together and make a frank admission of your debts and harmful spending habits. Do this on a piece of paper, calmly and matter-of-factly. Worry blocks creative thinking, and there is no point worrying now—look forward instead to the changes you plan to make.

When you have grasped the extent of your problem, bow your head and offer it up to God. Say, “Lord, we are in financial trouble. We don’t have all the answers yet, but we trust you to provide them, and to turn us in a new direction. Please be with us now.” Believe that God intends to help you.

Still thinking prayerfully, begin to lay out a new family budget. Go through everything you bought in the previous month. Did you really need all of it? The most life-giving people in the world are not those with the most things. They are people with the best relationships. And the stuff of relationships—conversations, meals together, walks in the park—are not expensive. Determine to downsize your life and reorient it around people instead of possessions.

In that spirit, develop a new plan of giving.

That may sound counterintuitive in a time of financial distress. But God promises riches to those who are generous. Not material riches, but richness of life. Find volunteer opportunities, spend more time with your family, give time and money to your church. It will all come back to you in a fuller, more happy life. As the Bible says in the book of Hebrews, “Be content with what you have, for God has said, ‘I will never fail you nor forsake you.’” That is happiness money can’t buy.



LOVE AGAIN

Relationships, even the best relationships, change. When a relationship is working, these changes are taken in stride. Husbands and wives age together, mastering the challenges of working, running a household and raising good children. Often, though, change can derail a relationship. Love cools, annoying habits grate, money troubles loom and the stress of keeping a family together chips away at marriage bonds.

If you find yourself fighting your loved one, if the love you once shared has dissolved into resentment and endless, destructive arguing, you need help. Many relationships have been saved by marriage counseling—the neutral, insightful voice of a counselor or pastor can help a husband and wife put their partnership back together.

Often, though, it can be a challenge even to agree to see a counselor—or to put the counsel-

or's advice into practice. If you want to save your relationship, both of you must first agree there is a problem and state it frankly. Then you must come together in prayer and place your relationship in God's hands. Don't ask God to change the other person. Ask him to change you both—and to show, by gradual illumination, how each of you is damaging your relationship.

The key to saving a marriage is learning the art of sacrificial love—love in which each partner places the other's needs above his or her own. That doesn't mean being a doormat or putting up with abusive behavior. It means mutually respectful love—the kind God gives to, and asks of, everyone. Pray for this kind of love. Get outside help if you can't seem to manage it on your own. And then hold to it with all your strength. It will create the kind of durable, nurturing relationship you are missing.

MAKE A PEACEFUL HOME

Your family is fighting. No one gets along. You dread coming home each day, knowing the chaos you'll encounter. How did it come to this, you wonder? It seems only yesterday your kids were toddlers taking their first steps. Now they barely talk to you.

Families are extraordinarily complex organisms. "Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," wrote Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. There is no one-size-fits-all advice for troubled households. Often, counseling from a therapist or pastor is necessary to restore harmony.

There are, however, some sound principles that can help you achieve peace and love in your family. The first sounds deceptively simple—dinner. Families who eat meals together—around a table, not a television—and help each other clean up get invaluable time for conversation,

checking in and relaxing with no distractions. Make time each evening for your family—it will make an immeasurable difference.

Second, pray. Gather for a time of free-form, informal prayer before bed. Let everyone lay hopes and fears, disappointments and accomplishments before God. You will be amazed how a habit of prayer mends hearts.

Finally, instead of looking for someone to blame, look inside yourself. You can't control others, but you can control you. Remember that God yearns for your family to work—and is ready to help when asked. Seek solutions in prayer, root out your own harmful behavior and choose the discipline of love. As Saint Paul wrote, “Love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor.” That is the foundation of a happy home.

COPE WITH GRIEF



The most shattering experience that can befall the human spirit is the death of a loved one. It is as if a beacon suddenly goes out, leaving you to wander across a desolate plain from which every familiar landmark has disappeared. The loss seems absolute. You wonder if you can go on.

No words, no theory, no formula can deaden the immediate, overwhelming pain of bereavement. But there are ways of coping with grief over the long haul—steps to help you live through loss with fortitude.

What you need when grieving is consolation, courage and love. While there are many sources for these things, one towers above the rest—religious faith, belief in the infinite goodness of God who promises to be with us, even through death, and to lead us on to everlasting life.

God may seem a remote consolation at a time like this. But he actually knows your grief more intimately than anyone else. Jesus, after all, wept at the death of his friend Lazarus, then suffered death himself on the cross. God has been there. He can share and comfort every dimension of your bereavement.

Don't be afraid, too, to give expression to your grief—to cry with friends or pray it out during time alone. Do you feel angry? You can share that with God, too. In fact, the closer and more open you get with him, the more he will be able to heal your heart. That is his great promise—to be with you always, in life, in death and beyond.



Tell Us *Your* Story



Guideposts Outreach would like to hear about how our booklets have made a positive impact in your life. Your story will be considered for publication in one of Guideposts' inspirational media. Please send us your story or you may e-mail us at outreach@guideposts.org

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