

How Faith Can Change Your Life

by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale

Introduction

Suppose a trusted friend came to you and said, “There’s a powerful new-old idea that people are talking about, one I think you should be aware of. It’s a concept available to all of us that can shape and change human lives for the better in an astonishing way.” What would you say?

You’d say, “Tell me about it!” wouldn’t you?

That’s what I want to do in this guide— tell you about it. Show you how it can help you conquer problems, banish worry, tension, even loneliness.

It is a form of mental activity—a kind of mental engineering—based on the principle that there is a deep tendency in human nature to ultimately become precisely like that which we imagine ourselves as being. Certainly this is not a new idea; it has been implicit in all the speaking and writing I have done in the past. But only recently has it caught the attention of doctors, psychologists, and thinkers everywhere, and a new word has been coined to describe it. That word is *imaging*, derived from imagination.

Imaging is positive thinking carried one step further. In imaging, you do not merely think about a hoped-for goal; you “see” or visualize it so vividly in your conscious mind that the unconscious mind accepts it and is activated by it. This releases powerful internal forces that can bring about astonishing changes in the life of the person who is doing the imaging. When this concept is applied steadily and systematically, it solves problems, and greatly enhances the chances for success in any kind of endeavor.

Imaging works best when it is combined with a strong religious faith, backed by prayer and the seemingly illogical technique of giving thanks for benefits before they are received. This combination of strong imaging backed by strong faith is irresistible.

Jesus Christ Himself said, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). This is the great promise that lies behind the theme of this booklet. Please keep it in mind as you turn this page and start reading. . .

1

How To Conquer Problems

In my pocket as I write these words is a card I always carry with me. It came to me many years ago, and I have it retyped occasionally because it gets ragged and worn. On it are five lines, as follows:

The light of God surrounds me
The love of God enfolds me
The power of God protects me
The presence of God watches over me
Wherever I am, God is!

Why do I carry this card? Because the image that it evokes of a loving, caring God is the perfect antidote to just about every problem under the sun. Whenever I’m troubled, I take that the card out and let it remind me that there is an all-powerful Being in the universe Who loves me and Who is only a prayer away.

This is the greatest concept that the human mind can hold. The more intensely you image it, the happier you are going to be, because you will never feel abandoned or alone. That’s what religion is all about, that’s what churches are all about, that’s what Christ came to teach us—that the love of God is available to us uncertain, groping, unsure human beings, all the time, no matter where we may be.

Sometimes, of course, people refuse to accept this wonderful message of reassurance and hope. I have in my library a book entitled *God Is Able* by a former New York City colleague of mine, Dr. John Ellis Large, who was for some years rector of the Church of the Heavenly Rest on upper Fifth Avenue. Dr. Large is a man of much experience in the healing ministry, and in his book he tells of the case of a man named George. This man’s wife, Sarah, was one of Dr. Large’s parishioners.

One day she came to see him. “I have a real problem,” she said. “It’s my husband.” She described him as irritable, irascible, and full of tension. Not surprisingly, he had developed all sorts of symptoms of poor health, too. But according to his wife, their doctor said there wasn’t anything wrong with him that couldn’t be straightened out if he got his life in order.

When she tried to talk to him about his problems, he ignored her. Meanwhile, his work was suffering. He was missing promotion after promotion at his office. She had talked to his boss, who told her that her husband was contentious and uncooperative. “At times,” he said, “George is full of downright meanness.”

When Dr. Large suggested that she bring this troubled man to see him she told him that George would never come. He had no use for the church. "I can't even get him to pray with me. He says he is fed up with God. He says he doubts there really is a God."

Then Dr. Large asked her this unexpected question: "What are your husband's sleeping habits?"

She replied that he tossed most of the night, but by about five in the morning he was in deep sleep. She had to wake him up to get him to the office.

"All right," the rector said, "I'll tell you what to do. At five every morning you get up and sit by your husband and pray for him. Believe that Jesus Christ is there by his side, actually present with you and him. Image your husband as a whole man—happy, controlled, organized and well. Hold that thought intently. Think of your prayers as reaching his unconscious mind. At that time in the morning his conscious mind is not resisting and you can get an idea into his unconscious. Visualize him as kindly, cooperative, happy, creative and enthusiastic."

Although frankly skeptical, the woman followed Dr. Large's advice. She woke promptly at 5:00 a.m., sat by her sleeping husband, and projected those thoughts into his unconscious. For many weeks nothing happened, but finally George said to her one day, "You know it's strange how nice everybody has become—people I used to think were hating and double-crossing me. What's come over them? They're all so nice. Everything is so different."

Some days later he came home from work, jubilant. He was being promoted to the position of division manager. He could hardly believe it. He said he asked his boss why and he told him, "Because of the great change in you. You're happy, you're cooperative, you're enthusiastic—you're becoming one of the best men we have."

His wife never did tell him how he was reached. But the disorder left him. Jesus Christ is still the greatest healer among all the great healers of the world.

Whenever some deeply troubled person comes to me, I try to plant in his or her mind this image of a loving God Who, in the Person of Jesus Christ, is a constant companion. I tell them that He said He would be with us unto the end of the world, and that He meant exactly what He said.

Frightened or unhappy people almost always respond to this message. I remember one night during the Korean War, when a phone call awakened me from a sound sleep. A distressed young woman on the other end of the line said her soldier husband was overseas in an area where there was heavy fighting and her fears that he wouldn't survive had crowded in on her in the dead of the night until now they seemed overwhelming.

When something unexpected like this happens, I always say a quick, silent prayer, asking for guidance in

what I'm about to say. This time, as I said my prayer, I thought I heard the sounds of a small baby in the background. "Is your baby frightened?" I asked her.

"No, I'm the one who's afraid," she replied. I suggested that perhaps it was because she was there with the child, that the baby felt safe. Then I suggested that she become like a little child herself. I told her, "You have a loving Father, you know. He's with you right now. Picture His arms around you, protective, strong. Be like the baby of yours. Relax—and trust. Do you think you can do that?"

She said she would try. "And one more thing," I said to her. "Thoughts can influence events in ways that no one fully understands. So instead of sending out these fear thoughts, pray for your husband's safe return. Strongly imagine him returning safe and sound. Thank God in advance for keeping him safe and bringing him back to you. Hold that image, day and night."

Months later that young couple came up to me at the church and introduced themselves. The young woman told me that she had never really known or felt the nearness of her Heavenly Father until she visualized Him during those periods of midnight crisis.

Believe that since the Kingdom of God is within all of us, the solutions to problems are also within us. The assumption makes sense. For the biggest problems can be solved when you are convinced that you are greater than anything that can happen to you.

Half a century of trying to relieve people in distress has left me convinced of three things:

1. *Every human being has an enormous problem-solving potential built into him or her.* Only when that potential is blocked or weakened by defeatist attitudes or negative emotions do problems seem unsolvable.

2. *Problems are an essential and necessary ingredient of life.* All worthwhile achievements are the result of problem solving. Problem solvers are strong people *because* they struggle to overcome difficulties or adversities. When I hear some troubled person cry, "Why does God let this happen to me?" I often feel like saying, "Because He knows you'll grow and be strengthened if you grapple with your difficulty; He *made* you that way!"

3. *The basic tools of problem solving are available to anyone.* One of the most effective is this technique of imaging. Anybody can experiment with it. And it can be applied to just about any problem under the sun.

One cautionary word, though, right here at the start. Make the Lord a silent partner in all forms of imaging, because He is the touchstone that will keep your desires on the high plane of morality where they belong. Imaging can be applied to unworthy goals as well as worthy ones. Praying about goals is essential, because if there are any selfish aims or sinful motives, they will appear as you pray. Pray to be sure your goal is right, for if it

isn't right it is wrong, and nothing wrong ever turned out right.

So never fail to hold your imaging goals up to the light before you set about achieving them.

In the remaining sections of this guide, you will be shown how imaging can be used to help solve some of the most common problems that plague and challenge human beings. Before you move on to those sections, however, here's a simple imaging technique that you may find helpful if some stubborn problem is troubling you. Take thirty seconds right now and picture yourself taking command over that problem. See yourself solving it, moving beyond it into a realm of confidence where other problems will be met and mastered as they arise.

Then take three long, deep breaths and exhale slowly after each one.

As you take the first one, say to yourself, "I'm breaching in confidence; I'm breathing out fear."

With the second: "I'm breathing in power; I'm breathing out weakness."

With the third: "I'm breathing in victory over my problem (name it); I'm breathing out defeat."

Then as you turn the page, visualize new confidence and determination flowing into you. You can take control of your problems. You can take command of your life. This guide is designed to help you do it—and it will!

2

How To Think Better of Yourself

Dr. Smiley Blanton, famous psychiatrist and one of the wisest men I've ever known, used to say that the most common problem he was called upon to deal with was lack of self-esteem. Most of the people who consulted him, Smiley said, were deficient in self-love. They had a poor opinion—a poor image—of themselves. And this great doctor always referred such people to the Lord's second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*" (Matthew 22:39, my italics).

"There it is," Dr. Smiley Blanton would say. "Plain as the nose on your face. Love is the answer to all human ills. The Bible says that you can't love anyone properly as long as you despise or downgrade yourself."

Inferiority complex: how would you define it? I think I'd say it was timidity in the presence of life. And Smiley was right: it is very common. I have found that often the most outwardly confident and aggressive people are using the apparent confidence as a mask for deep doubts about themselves and their ability to cope with the challenges and problems of living.

It's a paradox, really. God made a masterpiece when He created human beings. The Bible says we rank just a little lower than the angels, which is pretty high on the scale of things. Now wouldn't you think that a creature made in God's image would be pretty sure of himself?

It's almost as if there were two separate, warring entities inside each of us: the strong and the weak, the bold and the fearful, the large and the small. Each of us has a "big me" and a "little me" inside, and many times the "little me" frustrates and paralyzes the "big me"

I remember reading some years ago about the world-famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso. One opening night at the opera, early in his career, Caruso was standing in the wings waiting to go on when he was seized by an overwhelming attack of stage fright. He was actually shaking with fear.

Then the stagehands nearby were astonished to hear him say, in a whispered command, "Out! You miserable 'little me,' get out of my way. Out! Out!"

Caruso was willing himself to change his self-image. He was saying to the fearful, timid element inside him that the strong, positive element inside him must prevail, would prevail, and in the face of this fierce counterattack, the "little me" shrank away. He swept onstage, sang with beauty and power, and the audience surged up, shouting "Bravo!" Were they applauding the skill of a great artist? Yes, but perhaps intuitively they were acclaiming something more—the man who brought the

“big me” out of himself by overcoming the fears and frustrations of the “little me.”

But there are millions of people who don't know how to shake off doubts and fears, millions who crawl through life on their hands and knees instead of standing tall and proud.

So what can you do if you have an ego that needs bolstering? The first thing is, examine your entire life and see if you can pinpoint some specific cause for these inferiority feelings. Often the cause goes back to childhood. Self-confidence can be damaged, sometimes by a harsh or hypercritical parent, sometimes by other children who tease or ridicule, sometimes by siblings who outshine or overshadow a sensitive brother or sister.

I remember one man who came to the Institutes of Religion and Health, a counseling service founded by Dr. Blanton and me some thirty years ago. He felt so wretchedly inadequate most of the time, he just felt that he couldn't cope. After long discussion and probing, it was found that as a small boy he had nearly drowned in a swimming pool. His mother forbade him ever to go in the water again. He would stand by the pool watching the other boys swim, and gradually the idea took hold of him that he couldn't do what the others did. Thus his disbelief in himself began to grow.

When we saw him his talk was full of symbolic references. “This is over my head,” he would say. Or, “This is too deep for me.” Or, “If I try this, I'll be sunk.” This man struggled so hard against a constant conviction of inadequacy that he was close to a nervous breakdown. I told him, as I tell everyone who has an inferiority complex, that the basic answer to the problem is to get a deep sense of the presence of God in your life. Image yourself walking alongside the Power that created the tiniest flower and holds the constellations in their places. No matter how fearful you think you are, if you get your consciousness filled to overflowing with God in this way, you will not be afraid of anything in this world. You will walk through life erect, head held high, unafraid.

How do you do it? You pray—which is conversation with God. You go where God is talked about and thought about and focused on—and that is usually in church or some good spiritual group, of which there are many. You read the Bible. But the Bible only comes to your rescue when you take its message and diligently apply it to yourself and your problems and to the image you have of yourself.

Take the story of David and Goliath, for instance. Everyone knows how the slender shepherd boy went out against the great armored giant of the Philistines with only a sling and five smooth stones. But that was only *part* of his armament, indeed the smallest part. Listen to the words of David himself as he went out to face what everyone else thought was certain death: “Thou (Goliath) comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and

with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts. . .” (1 Samuel 17:45).

In other words, David went to battle supported by a God-saturated mind. That was his powerful armament. Therefore he knew no fear. And therefore he was victorious.”

Now apply the truth of that famous Bible passage to yourself. What are the fearsome problems that frighten you, that give you a sense of inadequacy? Stand up to them, as the story says, in the name of the Lord.

Select one of those problems and take some action against it. Remember what Emerson said: “Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain.”

Self-doubt sets up a barrier and timid people turn back when they encounter it. They keep turning back until it becomes a habit—a bad habit. But if you crash through it, if you *do* the thing you fear—just once—the barrier will be broken and your image of yourself will be upgraded. Confidence will begin to flood into your mind and drive out the doubts and the feelings of inadequacy.

One last suggestion: If you feel inadequate, sometimes it is a good idea to ask yourself, “Inadequate compared to what?” I've known people who were despondent and downcast because they allowed themselves to become victims of too-great expectations. Nine times out of ten, a feeling of inferiority is nothing but a state of mind. It was Milton who wrote:

The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a hell of
Heav'n.

Image yourself as a worthwhile person; *act as if* you were someone worthy of admiration and respect—and gradually that is what you will come to be. What you can image, you will *be*, in the long run.

To sum up, then, here are some specific things to do if you need to bolster a shaky ego: Hold in your Mind the image of the kind of person you want to be: confident, assured, competent, calm. Break through the “fear barrier” by deliberately doing something that has been causing you apprehension. Say to yourself, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and I *will* do this thing that I have been flinching from.”

Remind yourself that God made you and that He does not do poor work. Vividly visualize the clean winds of faith blowing through your mind and sweeping away all the cobwebs of self-doubt and self-distrust.

Try to find the root cause of your feelings of inadequacy. Once you bring it into the open, it will lose much of its power to dominate you. Ask the good Lord to go back into your past, to find the hurtful memories and heal them. He stands ready, always, to aid you. :

Let the “big you” brush aside the “little you.” Visualize the “big you” wielding a big broom and doing just that.

Be realistic; accept some limitations as natural and inevitable. Nobody is “the best” at everything. But image yourself as the best at something.

Stop telling yourself that you can’t. Image yourself succeeding in the area where you wish most completely for success. Imagine a television screen on the wall in front of you. In that screen, see yourself as the principal actor doing the thing you long to do. Run this “film” over and over again in your mind. This is the technique my wife Ruth and I learned in the formation of *Guideposts* magazine.

It is called imaging. It worked for us. It can work for you.

How To Surmount Money Problems

With the possible exception of health problems, money problems weigh more heavily on people’s minds than any other form of anxiety. My wife Ruth and I are constantly made aware of this by the mail that reaches us. Despairing letters from elderly people whose fixed incomes are being eroded by inflation. Frantic letters from young people caught in the quicksand of installment buying or credit card spending. Panicky letters from people staggering under mountainous debts. Fear-filled letters from people who have lost their jobs. The list goes on and on.

Tremendous emotional currents often swirl around money problems. A letter came in the other day from a young woman who said bitterly that she hated money. She hated it for what it did to people like herself who didn’t have enough (she’d been laid off from her automotive-company job). She hated it for what she claimed it often did to people who had too much. She said that America had become a materialistic, money-grubbing, dollar-worshiping society, and she blamed money for that. She even misquoted the Bible. “Money is the root of all evil,” she wrote, underscoring every word. (Actually, the Bible says that the *love* of money is the root of all evil, quite a different thing.)

I wrote to the young woman and urged her to try to change her image of herself. “Stop seeing yourself as the helpless victim of an imaginary villain called money,” I wrote. “If you personalize money so vehemently and hate it so intensely, you certainly won’t attract it, because your unconscious mind will be programmed to repel and reject it.”

I urged her to create and focus on the self-image of a well-balanced, intelligent person whose mind was able to take charge of her emotions. “Calm down,” I wrote. “Be objective. Stop all this hate business. Hold the image of yourself as someone determined to remove all those churning, turbulent, conflicting, confusing emotions from your mind. Nothing is going to go right for you until you do.

In trying to solve life’s problems, imaging is only one of the many techniques. Through the years, trying to help people in financial difficulty, Ruth and I have worked out half a dozen simple suggestions that seem to be effective.

The first is simply this; *don’t panic*. If you find anxiety getting the upper hand, go to work imaging peace of mind. The simple act of praying creates an image of your problems being brought to the Source of all wisdom, and

that is tremendously reassuring and comforting. Then read the Twenty-third Psalm. When you come to those marvelous words "...I will fear no evil; for thou art with me..." (verse 4), run them through your mind at least twenty times. Repeat them to yourself during the day if you feel your anxiety returning. Write them on a piece of paper and tape it on your bathroom mirror, where you will see it first thing every morning. Saturate yourself with this idea.

Then, when you have your emotions under control, the next step is to *get organized*. This is Ruth's favorite bit of advice because she is a highly organized person herself. Make a complete list of all your debts, everything you owe. Make another list of essential expenses. Add up all your sources of income and see what you can count on. It's amazing how many people really don't know exactly how much they owe or what their basic expenses are. Visualize yourself living within your income with a fraction left over for debt reduction. Paint that image vividly in your mind.

Next, *be disciplined*. You have to learn to ignore that sly little destructive demon named Instant Gratification who lurks in all of us and whispers, "That's pretty; get it!" or "That's a bargain; grab it!"

A fourth suggestion we sometimes offer is blunt and to the point: *think*. If you'll just sit down and really think, you may come up with an idea or an insight that can change everything.

I've always liked William Saroyan's story about the time when, as a struggling young writer, discouraged and almost broke, he decided to ask a rich uncle in a nearby city for a loan. With his last bit of cash, Saroyan sent his uncle a telegram. Back came a reply of just three words: HAVE HEAD EXAMINED.

Once he got over the shock of this seemingly sarcastic refusal, Saroyan pondered the message. Gradually he began to see what his uncle was saying: You don't need a loan. Look inside your head. That's where you'll find a solution in a new idea.

Thus challenged, Saroyan sat down, thought up a plot for a short story, wrote it, sold it, and was on his way to a brilliant career as playwright and novelist.

Michael Cardone is a friend of ours who in middle age found himself out of work. But he didn't let it get him down. One day he saw a pile of discarded, worn-out windshield-wiper motors in a garage, and he began to wonder why they couldn't be fixed and sold more cheaply than new ones. So he began to fix them and sell them—a pretty odd job because there was no demand for rebuilt wiper motors and no one had ever bothered to do it before. But he kept on, and today Michael Cardone is the head of an enormous plant in Philadelphia that makes all sorts of automotive supplies. Why? Because he had a dream, an image of being his own boss, of running his own show, of finding automotive needs and

filling them—and an odd job was the springboard that started him on his way. And what he was able to image, he became.

Michael Cardone is an intensely religious man. He and the top executives in his company begin every business day with prayer. They're convinced that if they have God as their senior partner, and make all decisions in the light of his teachings, they cannot go wrong. Michael himself is sure that there is a spiritual side to every great success story, and his own accomplishments seem to prove him right.

Ruth and I agree with Michael in believing that there is a spiritual force in all this, something that goes beyond the reach of reason. Back in 1931 when I was a young minister, recently married, my salary (six thousand dollars a year, a handsome one for those days) was cut twice—first to five thousand, then to four thousand. We had no manse or home supplied by the church. Everyone was frightened and depressed. Businesses were failing. Nobody could borrow money; there was no money to be had.

At four thousand dollars a year. I just didn't see how we could get by. My salary was the only income we had. And I was helping my younger brother with college expenses and I knew he had to count on that. The pressure got worse and worse. I hated to burden Ruth with my fears, but one night I said to her, "We're in a desperate situation. We can't pay the bills. What are we going to do?" And her answer really startled me. She said, "We're going to start tithing."

I said that was impossible. "No," Ruth said. "Not impossible. Essential. You know what the Bible promises to those who give ten percent of everything to the Lord." I can see her yet, standing right there in the kitchen and quoting Malachi 3:10 to me: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse... and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Ruth said we were going to do exactly that, because the Bible says that if you have faith even as small as a grain of mustard seed, nothing will be impossible. "We have to start imaging God's prosperity," she said.

And Ruth was right, we did get by. Money certainly didn't pour in, but there always was just enough. Furthermore, the act of tithing seemed to calm my fears and stimulate my mind so that I began thinking. I started imaging. I knew I had one small talent: public speaking. And so I decided to try to capitalize on that. I offered myself as a public speaker wherever one was needed. I spoke at civic clubs and garden clubs and graduations and community gatherings. Sometimes I was paid five or ten dollars, sometimes nothing at all. But it helped. What a thrill I felt when I received the first twenty-five dollar fee. Then someone who heard me speak offered me a chance to go on radio. Again, there was no money for

this, but the number of speaking invitations increased. So one thing led to another, and gradually we began to get our heads above water.

I am convinced that tithing did it. There is something about this practice of giving that can't be explained in purely rational terms. Tithing seems to put a person in touch with some mysterious force that attracts money. Not a lot of money, necessarily, but enough for the tither's needs.

It's almost as if there were an invisible reservoir of abundance in the universe that can be tapped if you will just obey certain spiritual laws. The word *abundance*, I'm told, comes from a Latin phrase meaning to "rise up in waves." When you tithe, it does seem as if little waves of abundance start rising up all around you.

So if you have financial difficulties, face up to them not just with courage and intelligence but also with warmhearted generosity and concern for others.

Here, then, are the key things to remember where money problems are concerned:

1. *Don't panic.* Fear not only paralyzes the will and the mind but it also seems, in some mysterious way, to scare money away, probably because fearful people are not creative or resourceful people. So try to be calm, be objective, be logical, be hopeful.

2. *Get organized.* Figure out exactly what your income is and what your outlays are. If you can't increase the former, reduce the latter until your budget is in balance. That's the only way to get runaway finances under control.

3. *Be disciplined.* Don't be an impulse buyer. Give up all credit or installment buying until you are debt free.

4. *Think.* Look inside your head for new ideas, new possible sources of income. Money problems can become assets if they force you into creative thinking. You may strike a vein of gold, as Michael Cardone did, that will last for the rest of your life.

5. *Give all you can.* Giving is the best way to put yourself in the great invisible stream of abundance that surges through the universe. Tithing is the surest way to do this, because God Himself has guaranteed the results, and God's promises never fail.

6. *Visualize yourself as debt free.* Imagine vividly the relief, the happiness, the peace of mind you will feel when the last payment is made. Hold that idea in your conscious mind until it sinks down into your I unconscious mind. And then you will have it forever, because it will have you.

How To Overcome Worry

I once knew a salesman whose life seemed to exhibit a consistent pattern of failure. He was worried, low on cash, and very low in spirit. He would try selling one thing and then another. One season it was paint, the next cosmetics, and the next office supplies and so on. He never seemed to make a success of it, and the image of failure became stamped indelibly on his mind.

Then one day someone handed him a piece of paper with a three-line affirmation on it. It went like this:

I believe that I am always divinely guided.
I believe that I will always take the right
turn in the road.
I believe that God will make a way where
there is no way.

Three lines. Nothing very complicated. No great eloquence. Rather repetitious, in fact. But this salesman began repeating these lines to himself every morning when he first woke up and every night when he went to bed. He let them sink deep into his innermost consciousness. And gradually this man began to change.

He no longer dithered and hesitated over what items he would try to sell. In his simple and unquestioning way he asked God to tell him. Then he listened, believingly, for an answer, meanwhile thanking God in advance for giving him the right answer.

Soon there was an equally dramatic change in the image the salesman had of himself. Now he imaged himself succeeding because his conscious mind and his unconscious mind had accepted the belief that with God as his ally and partner, he could not fail. Once he began to act as if he could not fail, he did not fail. He went on to become one of the best salesmen in his part of the country, all because his life had been revolutionized by three simple phrases, each beginning with two magic words: *I believe.*

But there is also such a thing as negative imaging. And the most common name for it is *worry*. When we worry we are using imaging, all right, but we are pointing it in the wrong direction. When we worry about our health, or our children, or our jobs, or our future, we are giving these fears a degree of reality by allowing them to pervade and color our thinking. And if they dominate our minds, they may also affect our actions.

The Bible, that extraordinary Book of Wisdom, clearly recognizes this. In the Book of Job, perhaps the most ancient of all Biblical writings, Job cries plaintively: "The thing which I greatly feared is come upon

me..." (Job 3:25). Of course it did. He imaged this dire happening—and finally it happened. Haven't you known of cases yourself where people display excessive fears of some misfortune and then that misfortune seems to seek them out? I know I have.

But let's be realistic: anyone who has any imagination at all is going to be concerned now and then. A little worry is probably a good thing, if it impels a person to take prudent action. It's chronic worry that is dangerous, the constant imaging of undesirable events.

When worry becomes really acute, it can clamp down on the mind like a vise, blotting out all rational thought processes. How, then, does one get rid of the clammy, clutching hands of worry around one's neck?

In the first place, you must believe it can be done. Picture or image yourself as worry free, and have faith that that picture can become a reality. Worry is a habit. It got into your mind because you practiced it, and anything you practice in, you can practice out.

More than once I have suggested to my congregation how wonderful it would be if they could just come forward to the altar, put their worries into a large basket and leave them there. "But then, you know," I sometimes add, "after the service some of you would creep back down the aisle and fish around in the basket until you found your discarded worry. You'd gotten so fond of it that you couldn't bear to be without it. And you'd go out hugging it tightly to you because you couldn't part with such an old, familiar friend." This always gets a laugh, or at least a chuckle, from my listeners. But there's more than a grain of truth in it, and they know it.

Second, if you have something preying on your mind, think about it. Stop imaging the worst possible eventuality and reacting with fear and dread. Push aside these negative emotions and use your mind positively. Thought is one of the greatest faculties that God gave to us human beings. Take a worry apart, lay it out, dissect it, analyze it. If you will do this with clear, cool, rational thinking, you'll find that nine times out of ten there won't be much left. There is so much illusionary content in worry that when this is dispelled, the reality that is left will prove to be very small—so small that you can handle it.

When I was a young man, I had a wise old friend, Dr. David Keppel. I used to seek him out when I was struggling with some problem. "Norman," he would say, "let's sit down and take this thing apart." And remarkably, when he got through doing that, as a rule there wasn't much of anything worrisome left. He always said that ninety-five percent of his own worries either never happened or were relatively innocuous when they did happen. "I could always handle that five percent," he used to say.

Another useful way to outwit worry is to use symbolism to get rid of it. Once a woman came to me be-

cause she was worried—almost literally—out of her senses. Some months previously she had had a slight heart attack. Her doctors told her she had made a good recovery and that her prospects were excellent, but she was obsessed by the fear of dying at any minute. She talked so compulsively and continuously about this fear that I could not get a word into the conversation. Finally I held out my hand, palm upward, and said, "Put it there."

"Put what there?" she asked, bewildered.

"Your problem," I said. "This thing that's worrying you. I know it's invisible, but I also know it's very real. I want you to stretch out your hand and put it into my hand."

Somewhat hesitantly she went through the procedure. I stood up, went to the door, opened it, and made a throwing gesture as if I were casting something out. I closed the door and went back to where she sat. "Now," I said, "the problem is no longer in this room. It's outside that door. We need to deal with it, and we will deal with it. But first we're going to fill the place inside you where that problem was with some thoughts of God and faith and hope. We're going to saturate your mind with the peace that Jesus Christ promised to all of us. And you will find that these thoughts are stronger than worry, stronger than fear."

And eventually she did. But first there had to be the symbolism, or the imaging, that made her receptive.

A fourth way to break the worry pattern is one that is available to all of us: divert yourself. Our word diversion comes from two Latin words meaning to "turn away from," and when worry begins to be a problem, that is the sensible thing to do: simply turn away from it.

This is not hard because fortunately the human mind is designed so that it cannot hold more than one idea at a time. You cannot actively worry about something when you are deliberately focusing on something else. So when worry has you by the throat, the simplest way to break its grip is to do something that you enjoy doing. Dig in the garden; play a game of golf; arrange some flowers; bake a cake; sing a song (why not a grand old hymn?); take the dog for a run—use your imagination. If all else fails, turn on the television! Anything to get your mind off yourself.

The final and best antidote for worry is simply this: Image Jesus Christ as actually your personal friend, your constant companion throughout the day. Picture Him in your mind. His compassionate eyes, those strong carpenter's hands. How did His voice sound when He talked to people, when He told the story of the Prodigal Son, for example? He must have had a wonderful laugh; can you picture yourself sitting on a hillside in Galilee, hearing it? If you can picture that, why not picture Him sitting alongside of you right now?

The more vivid that image in your mind, the freer from worry you will be.

And anyone, including you, can be free of worry if you will fill your mind with the factual idea that God is with you and is giving you a normal, steady, intelligent attitude toward the problems of life. When you image yourself as living close to God, you will have the ability to get your mind above the confusion and heat of worry into a place of clarity and calm. Many have found this practice the best way to outwit worry.

Imaging outwits worry. Try it. You'll see.

5

How To Deal With Loneliness

An unhappy woman came to consult me a few months ago. She was in her mid-fifties, I judged, pleasant looking but with an aura of dejection about her. "Dr. Peale," she said, "I'm in prison, and I can't get out."

"What sort of prison?" I asked her.

"The prison of loneliness," she said. "The prison of isolation from life. And I'm not the only one; there are thousands upon thousands of us—mostly elderly people, but some just middle-aged and widowed, like me."

I did feel sorry for her. I said, "Don't you have some friends or relatives who can partially fill the gap left by your husband's death?"

She shook her head. "No relatives here in the city," she said. "I have a few acquaintances, but they are all busy with their own lives. They don't have time for me, and I don't blame them."

"Why do you say that?" I asked her.

"Well," she said with a wan smile, "I'm not the most scintillating company in the world. I never finished college; I just met Ralph and married him. I don't have much to contribute, I guess. I don't have any skills to get a job with. I'm just a homebody, really. Nobody cares much about homebodies these days."

"You say you're a prisoner," I said to her. "And you want me to help you organize a jailbreak. Well, to begin with, do you know who holds the key to your cell? Do you know who your jailer really is?"

"No," she said, looking puzzled, "not really."

"I think you do know," I told her. "The jailer is you. You're the only person who has the key to your cell. You're the only one who can open the door that leads to freedom. You'll never do it so long as you hold in your mind this image of yourself as a helpless victim of circumstance. If you continue to image yourself that way, that is what you will continue to be. So if we are really going to organize a jailbreak, we will have to begin with you and some of these attitudes that are walling you in."

"Isn't it too late," she said, "to start changing attitudes at my age?"

"That is just the sort of attitude we need to change," I told her. "Of course it's not too late! We can start right now. We are going to do some creative imaging of a fascinating existence for you. Now I challenge you, this very moment, to throw that tired, old, downbeat, negative image of yourself right out of your mind. In its place visualize a woman—you—with a smile on her face and

a song in her heart, inviting a friend over for lunch or a movie or a trip to a museum—and being invited back, taking bridge lessons, offering her time and energy as a volunteer at some hospital, buying a new dress or a new coat, going to church on Sunday and meeting new people, taking up a new hobby or two, photography, perhaps, bird-watching, anything. But always image a new life, a vital, interesting life.”

I was watching her face as I talked, and I could see hope and doubt simultaneously in her eyes.

“Push those doubts out of your mind, and do it now,” I told her. “Pin up this image of the new. The doubts will try to come back, and so will a lot of other old, tired attitudes and habits. But start every day with a prayer. Prayerize, visualize, actualize—that is the formula for successful imaging. If you carry out the first two steps with all the intensity you can muster, I promise you that the third step will take care of itself.”

Twice since then, I’ve had occasional reports from this woman. She hasn’t turned into a complete extrovert overnight, but she is really trying and she is getting somewhere with her new self-image. She is busier and she is happier—and she’s stopped thinking of herself as a prisoner.

I’ve heard it said that loneliness is the great modern plague, that it exists in epidemic proportions. Well, let’s take a closer look at this affliction that claims so many victims, and try to list some countermeasures.

First, I think it helps to realize that being alone doesn’t necessarily make you lonely. I know quite a few people who actually enjoy solitude because they’ve mastered the art of living pleasantly with themselves. You have to spend every minute of your life in your own company. If you don’t enjoy it, you’re going to be miserable. If you do enjoy it, solitude will never bother you.

If the time you spend alone is to be spent pleasantly, you have to know yourself—and you have to like yourself.

Knowing yourself means understanding what makes you happy, what makes you sad, what gives you pleasure, and what bores you. Take myself, for example: I’m a worker. I like to work, I am accustomed to work, I feel happiest when I’m working. Holidays tend to make me restless because I have the uncomfortable feeling that I’m wasting my time. I like the satisfaction that comes from getting things done, so when I have to be alone I’m able to live pleasantly with myself by filling my waking hours with the work I love to do—like writing, for example.

Then there is the question of liking yourself. Most of us think of ourselves quite favorably most of the time. But there are a surprising number of people whose self-esteem is too low. People who have done things they are ashamed of, or suffer from an inferiority complex, or demand too much of themselves and then blame them-

selves when they fall short. How can other people be attracted to them if they don’t like themselves?

The plain truth is, many lonely people are lonely because they turn other people off. They are irritable. Or rude. Or complaining. Or critical. Or self-centered. Or downbeat. Or opinionated. Or just plain dull.

So if you are lonely, perhaps there is something in your own personality causing that loneliness. And if it is, you have to isolate it and actively do something about it.

Review your attitude about people in general. Do you really like to be around people? Do you care about them and show them that you care? When you have an outflowing attitude of genuine caring, it creates a state of harmony between you and other people that is irresistible. People feel it instantly, and they always respond.

Another cure for loneliness lies in that old exhortation: Don’t just sit there, do something! One of the most common causes of loneliness is inertia and the apathy that comes from not having enough to do.

I remember one day coming out of a Rotary luncheon and seeing a widow of a Rotarian, who had died some weeks before, sitting in the lobby. When I asked her why she was there, she said that it made her feel less lonely to sit outside the Rotary meeting that had meant so much to her husband.

“If you’ll come with me,” I told her, “I’ll give you a better solution.” I took her to my church, where some cheerful women volunteers were stuffing envelopes and having a lot of fun together. The women took her in, made friends with her and kept her busy. Later she told me that having something useful to do, and congenial people to do it with, had rescued her from despair.

But remember this: if you are lonely, you can’t just wait for someone to come along and rescue you. You have to be willing to make a move yourself. Form a picture of the interesting life you want to live and of one in which you have many friends and exciting interests. Hold that image and move constantly toward it. The mental picture will reproduce itself as fact.

Finally, the best remedy for loneliness is available to each of us, all the time. Not long ago I read about a power failure in a Salt Lake City hotel that left an elevator stuck between floors in total darkness—a frightening situation. Rescue workers, hearing a woman’s voice inside, called out, “Are you alone in there?” “I’m by myself,” came the calm reply, “but I’m not alone.” People soon caught on that she meant God was with her, protecting her, as indeed He was.

You don’t have to be trapped in an elevator to practice the presence of God. You can talk to Him anyplace, anytime, about anything, and He will listen and respond.

Jesus said, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

Hold fast to that assurance, and the dark shadows of loneliness will fade away.

How To Take the Tenseness Out of Tension

What is this thing called tension, this painful feeling called tension? It is not easy to define. Fear can cause it, but it's not exactly fear. Worry can cause it; so can guilt, hate, or frustration. One thing is sure: We all know the dismal feeling that comes when tension digs its claws into us. The sense of strain. The feelings of inadequacy. The pessimism. The low boiling point. "My nerves are shot," we say. "I'm uptight. I'm ready to climb the walls."

Certainly there is too much tension, too much uptightness in our lives; the prevalence of high blood pressure and the astronomical sales of tranquilizers attest to that. But a little of it can be a stimulus, even a good thing. Dr. Hans Selye, the famous Canadian authority on this problem, says that some stress is inevitable and even desirable if an organism is to meet the challenges of its environment successfully.

Then there is a negative kind of tension that hurts and cripples and limits people. Let's look at what can be done about it.

Years ago, I ran across a remedy for acute tension that I have been using and recommending ever since. It is a three-part remedy, and one of those parts involves imaging, although that word was not in use at the time.

Coming home one evening, tired and tense and uptight, I fell into my favorite chair and glanced at the table alongside the chair where my loving wife has a habit of leaving books or magazines or pamphlets that she thinks might interest me. This time she had left, among other things, an insurance brochure. I remember it had the word "you" on the cover in big red letters, and a picture of a hand with an accusatory finger pointing right at the reader. "You," it said, "are full of tension! You are uptight! You are just about ready to explode!" *Well, I thought, that is a pretty good description of the way I'm feeling, all right. Maybe I'd better see what else they have to say about uptightness.*

The pamphlet went on to say that to get rid of excess tension you had to do three things. The first was to practice relaxation of the physical body. "Sag back in your chair," it said. "Start relaxing every muscle, beginning with your toes. Stretch out your legs, flex your ankles, try to push your toes right off your feet, then let everything go limp. Let your head fall back. Roll it around so that your neck muscles are loosened up. Let each hand fall on your knee and rest there as limp as a wet leaf on a log. Open your eyes wide, then pretend invisible weights are attached to your eyelids, slowly pulling them shut.

Imagine a soft, gentle hand lightly touching your face, smoothing the tension lines away. Picture the tension draining out of your body, leaving it calm and peaceful and relaxed."

"Now you are ready for the second stage, which is the relaxation of the mind. This requires an effort of concentrated imagination. See yourself alone in the north woods of upstate New York on a perfect summer's day. You are sitting with your back against a tree; you can feel the rough bark through your shirt. All around you is a forest of fir, spruce, and hemlock. The air is scented with balsam. You can hear a gentle wind sighing in the treetops. In the far distance, blue hills are outlined against a tranquil sky. That sky is mirrored in a gleaming lake whose unruffled surface is broken only by the occasional leap of a fish. The ripples spread outward and are gone. The warm sun falls on your face like a benediction. Somewhere a bird calls and another answers. In the silence that follows, the healing beauty of God's creation surrounds you. Your uptightness fades away, smaller, smaller, until it is completely gone. Tension is no more. You are at peace. . . ."

The pamphlet called that kind of mind relaxing an exercise in concentrated imagination. And so it was. But it was also a good example of imaging.

The third part of the remedy involved a deliberate attempt to refresh the soul by recalling and meditation upon great passages and great promises from the Scriptures. I have often found that one of the best antidotes for uptightness is simply to recite aloud the Twenty-third Psalm. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (verse 4). They do indeed!

The more you read your Bible, the more you memorize parts of it, the more you let these fragments of ancient wisdom sink down into the depths of your being, the less vulnerable you will be to the fears and uncertainties and perplexities that are the causes of tension.

The three-pronged message of that insurance brochure was plain: Somehow, no matter how much stress or tension surrounds you, you have to try to maintain an inner equanimity, an imperturbability that cannot be shaken by external circumstances, no matter how trying or painful they may be.

There are, of course, crises much more crucial than the everyday kind of problems that creep into one's life. But even when a situation seems hopeless, a calm, resolute imaging can hold off despair. Last winter I read a newspaper story about a truck driver in a Midwestern state who was caught in a roaring blizzard. His wife had begged him not to make the run that night, for the radio was forecasting a snowstorm of major proportions. But he had a load of steel wire that had to be delivered, so he didn't listen to her. Halfway to his destination, the

How To Deepen Your Faith

howling storm swept down on him. When driving conditions became impossible, he pulled the big truck off the road and went to sleep.

When he woke up, everything was dark. Although he didn't know it, the truck was buried in a snowdrift thirty feet deep. He was trapped. On his CB radio, he could dimly hear the voices of state police and other rescue teams, but he could not communicate with them. His CB could receive but could not transmit through all the snow.

For five days and nights he stayed in his icy tomb. He had no food. To quench his thirst he ate snow. Five days and nights. One hundred twenty endless hours. But he didn't panic. He didn't despair. He waited, calmly and stoically, to be rescued; and finally he was.

I was so impressed when I read his story that I called him on the telephone and told him how much I admired his courage and stamina. "Weren't you afraid?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I knew my brother would be looking for me. I knew he wouldn't rest until he found me. In my mind I could see him searching, searching up and down that highway, never getting discouraged, never giving up. I could see him just as plain as day, finally locating the drift I was buried in. And as long as I could see him like that, I wasn't afraid. It was just a question of when he'd find me, not if he'd find me. And finally he did."

There was a classic use of imaging: a man in deep trouble vividly seeing a desired goal or outcome, holding it resolutely in his mind until it became a reality. He might have visualized himself starving, or frozen, or suffocated, but he didn't. He saw himself being rescued, and that image held the wolves of fear and panic at bay.

Tension can invade every area of our life, if we let it in. And the final antidote? St. Matthew gave it to us: "According to your faith be it unto you" (verse 9:29). Believe, pray, image, give thanks—and tension can be eliminated from your life.

In the hundreds of letters that come to Ruth and me from people with problems, one of the most constant and recurring themes is lack of faith.

"I don't seem to have much faith," the unhappy refrain goes. "I try to believe, but my beliefs are shaky."

"Why isn't my faith stronger? What can I do to deepen it?"

Month after month, year after year, the letters keep coming.

I sympathize with these seekers after faith, but really they are blocking themselves. When you *see* yourself as a person of inadequate faith, when you *accept* the idea that you are limited in this crucial area, when you *project* this image of yourself to others, you are really notifying your unconscious mind that you are the plaintive possessor of a permanent spiritual deficiency. If your unconscious mind accepts that image, as ultimately it will, it will program itself—and you—to perpetuate this unhappy state of affairs. That is why people tend to be, and to remain, what they keep telling themselves they are.

So the first thing the person who wishes to deepen his faith must do is change that negative image of himself as a faithless person to something else.

One way to accomplish this change is by using a powerful imaging technique that consists of just three words: *act as if*. So you think you don't have much faith? No matter: act as if you did. Act as if the whole of the Gospel story, the good news proclaimed by Jesus that God loves us and cares for us, the marvelous promise He gave us that He would never abandon us, His assurance that we could have forgiveness of sins if we repented of them, His pledge that if we obeyed and believed we would have life eternal—act as if it were all true. Never mind if you feel it is too good to be true; never mind if your doubts seem overpowering; *act as if you believed*.

If you do, your unconscious mind will respond. It will say to itself, "Here is this person *acting* like a believer, so I am going to program him or her toward faith instead of away from it." And once your unconscious mind takes hold of that idea, you will find yourself being swept along by a current flowing ever more strongly from the arid deserts of doubt to the green fields of spiritual certainty.

Another thing: while you act as if, give thanks that this change in your life is actually taking place now.

Even when you can't see it happening, even when you don't know for sure whether it is happening, give thanks, because the act of giving thanks for as-yet-unglimpsed benefits is in itself a powerful form of faith.

Prayer has always been the most effective way to get close to the Lord. Sometimes when Ruth and I are in England, in the Lake District, we return to the place where Wordsworth is said to have written his poem "The Daffodils." Wordsworth tells us that in such beautiful spots it was his custom to imagine (image) Jesus as actually being close beside him. He would quote some words of the Saviour, then reflectively say, "I wonder what the tone of Jesus' voice was when He said that?" He would "listen" to what the voice might have sounded like—the tonal quality, the depth of feeling. And then he would ask, "I wonder what the expression on His face was like when He said those words?" By imaging Jesus so vividly, lovingly filling in all those details, the poet felt the reality of His actual presence.

Nothing is more faith strengthening than to pray and have your prayer answered. In our counseling work, Ruth and I have learned, when a human problem is brought to us, to put it into a spiritual dimension by praying about it. Once that is done with sincerity and humility, we often find that mighty forces come to our aid.

Sometimes, I think, people refuse to believe that prayer brings such quick solutions. They say, "Oh, that's just coincidence!" or "Oh, well, that would probably have happened anyway." This is negative imaging that can only serve to dilute what little faith the person may have to begin with.

But sometimes the cause and effect of prayer is so quick and so powerful that it converts a person into a total believer for the rest of his life. Not long ago I was in a taxi and noticed that the driver had a Dutch-sounding name. When I asked him about it, he said that he was indeed from Rotterdam. So I told him that I was a minister of the church which the Dutch established in New York way back in 1628, and we had a friendly chat.

As we drove along he asked, "Have you time to let me tell you a little story? It is about the first time I really met God, and it shows how good God is. I have great faith, sir, and I know that I can never get outside the care and love of God.

"It was close to the end of World War II. I was a little boy in Holland. Our country had been ravaged. The Germans had been driven out, but we were left absolutely destitute. We had ration stamps, but they weren't any good, for we had no food at all. There was no food in the warehouses or in the stores or in the country districts. Holland had been swept clean. There was nothing left.

"We were reduced to eating beets out of the fields and it was a kind of beet that is dangerous to eat without long cooking—and even then, if you don't accompany it with other food, a chemical reaction will bloat and dis-

tend the stomach. Some people died from that chemical reaction." He shook his head and was silent for a moment. Then he continued, "you know how beautiful Holland tulips are? We dug the bulbs out of the ground and ate them. That was all we had. We were desperate."

Again he was silent. I could tell he was deeply moved by those memories. Finally he went on. "A notice from our pastor went around, telling us that there would be a meeting in the church. He said that since there was no other hope, we would have a meeting and pray to God and tell Him we were His children and ask Him to feed us. It was the only thing we could do. The big church was packed; two thousand people were present. There was no sermon. We just prayed, hour after hour. The pastor prayed. People prayed aloud all over the church. We sat there huddled together, praying to God.

"I was only a little boy, but all of a sudden I became aware that God was right there with us. His presence was so strong that I was almost frightened. I could feel Him in my heart. I knew that He was there and I knew that somehow He was going to take care of us poor, starving people.

"Then we sang one of those great old Dutch hymns of faith and we went out to the streets and to our homes. With a gnawing, empty stomach went to bed and fell asleep. Early the next morning we were awakened by, the roar of a tremendous armada of Allied airplanes over Rotterdam, and there began an unbelievable shower of food. The sky was full of big packages, dangling from parachutes, that came floating down to the streets of Rotterdam, filling the avenues with good food. And we ate. And we were saved."

He glanced back at me from the driver's seat as he said, "As long as I live, I will believe that God heard those prayers and out of His big heart of love He fed His children.

I do believe it. And I am sure you do, also. How could anyone doubt a soul-stirring story like that? Why try to analyze it or question it or explain it away? Why not let it move you and strengthen your faith?

My final and most important suggestion to help you deepen your faith is this: *Stay close to Jesus Christ always.* Commit your life to Him. He was the first to teach the power of imaging. He told His disciples, quite plainly, that what they pictured with faith would come to pass. Now, after more than nineteen centuries, scientists and psychiatrists and psychologists are at last beginning to proclaim what the faithful knew all along: He was right.

Christ does not change; He is the same yesterday and today and forever. And the truth of His teaching doesn't change, either. You can count on it, indeed. You can stake your life on it.

With Him by your side, you can have the most sublime of all dynamic images and achieve a sure victory in this life and the next.