

# *How To Develop Inner Calmness*



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## HOW TO DEVELOP INNER CALMNESS

*Scripture: Colossians 3:15; Philippians 3:13*

Can you honestly say that you are master of your emotional life? Do you have self-control? Emerson once said that the controlled man is the powerful man. But, let's face it, all too many of us are pushed around by our emotions, not regulated by our thought processes. No person ever lived successfully who wasn't primarily regulated by cool, rational, factual, thoughtful mental processes.

So the topic on which I wish to speak to you today is: how to develop inner calmness. I cannot imagine any topic more definitely suited to the time in which we live, for this has been called the age of anxiety, the age of fear, the age of the neurotic. The incidence of emotional disturbance is very high. The people who have strong inner control seem to be in the minority.

Now suppose you could find in liquid form a formula guaranteed always, under every circumstance, to give you inner calmness and control — how much would it be worth? Suppose you could put that formula in a bottle and get a good name for it and advertise it on television and radio — how many bottles of it do you think you would sell? Why, its sales would run into the millions. Wouldn't it be convenient if you could get inner calmness out of a bottle or out of a pill or as an injection into the bloodstream? But unfortunately — or fortunately, as the case may be — that isn't the way it works.

Where do you get inner calmness then? You get it out of a Book, in the form of an idea. An idea taken into consciousness has infinitely greater potency than anything you can get out of a bottle or a pill. And this is the formula for inner calmness: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." Isn't that mellifluous? The very saying of it induces a serene attitude.

What is the peace of God? Well, it is not the peace of this world. The peace of this world passes away. There is, of course, peace at the seashore, where the water washes gently on soft shores of sand. There is peace in some great valley, surrounded by eternal mountains. There is peace on the desert, where at night the stars seem so near that you feel you can almost pluck them from the sky. But people can be in these surroundings where the peace of the world is so lovely, and still be in tumult in their minds and hearts.

The peace of God, on the other hand, comes from the essence of life itself. It is eternal and everlasting. It falls on the human spirit like a benediction of ineffable serenity. "Let the peace of God rule (that is, be dominant) in your hearts." This is the formula that leads to inner calmness.

Tension can literally break us. I remember when I was very young hearing Enrico Caruso sing. I'm no judge of singers, but I thought Caruso was right good. He was a tremendous person too, as well as a noble tenor. He was a dramatic person. I well remember the impact of his personality on stage. And he was even dramatic privately, so they say. It seems he used to have a dinner-table trick which he would do if his dinner companions got to talking about tension — which I suppose was frequent, since artists are said to be high strung. Caruso would hold a

thin-stemmed glass high above his head and he would sing an ascending scale until he struck a certain note. Then he would repeat this note until the glass shattered into a hundred pieces. High tension from the sound waves broke the glass.

At the proving grounds of automobile manufacturers, I understand, the ultimate test of the durability and stability of an automobile is not determined by bumping it over a rough road — not at all; they drive it at very high speed over a smooth concrete road, the idea being that the tensions of high speed reaching up into the mechanism of the car will find weak spots more surely than the bumping process.

Now if such things can happen to a glass or to a structure of steel, how much more certainly can the tensions induced by emotional uncontrol reach into, feel for and discover the weaknesses in our nature? They can break us, bring on illness, lead to ineffectiveness.

I have been reading recently a most remarkable book by Dr. Paul Tournier, a celebrated Swiss physician and psychiatrist. The title of his book is *The Healing of Persons*.<sup>\*</sup> If you want to know how wrong thinking and wrong acting will affect you physically, I recommend this book. Among other things this doctor says: "Most illnesses do not, as is generally thought, come like a bolt out of the blue. The ground is prepared for years, through faulty diet, intemperance, overwork, and moral conflicts, slowly eroding the subject's vitality. And when at last the illness suddenly shows itself, it would be a most superficial medicine which treated it without going back

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<sup>\*</sup>*The Healing of Persons*, by Paul Tournier, \$4.95, Harper & Row.

to its remote causes . . .” Quoting a fellow doctor, Dr. Tournier says, “Man does not die. He kills himself.”

Now that is a solemn thought. There are many people this very day who are killing themselves, people who will die long years before they should because they are not masters of themselves mentally and emotionally. Dr. Tournier continues: “Every act of physical, psychological, or moral disobedience of God’s purpose is an act of wrong living, and has its inevitable consequences.” Knowing this, Dr. Tournier’s practice is to “treat the patient, not the disease.” If the doctors can help the patient overcome wrong thinking and correct wrong action, they thereby put him in a position for nature to heal him.

It is for this reason that the subject of how to develop inner calmness may properly be considered during a service of divine worship. The purposes of worshiping God include expressing our dependence upon Him, pondering His Holy Word, conditioning ourselves to live according to His will. But worship is also a basic part of spiritual healing. Where is the healthiest place anybody can be on Sunday morning? The highway? Not on your life! A golf course? Well, I’m not going to minimize the health-giving value of golfing, but I have difficulty in understanding why it must be Sunday morning at churchtime. No, the healthiest place to be Sunday morning is in church where one receives a healing treatment of the mind and of the soul and of the body. Every person should go forth from worship with the peace of God ruling in his heart.

“Well,” you say, “that is harder than it sounds. It sounds easy but works hard.” And with that I agree. It isn’t easy. There is nothing about the Gospel that is

easy. It is hard to condition your mind so that you become master of yourself. But you *can* do it.

You know something? You can do anything with yourself that you want to do, provided you want to badly enough. What you want yourself to be you can be. You can make any attitude become your dominant attitude if you will just discipline yourself. And there’s the rub. Modern Americans don’t like the word “discipline.” But, let me tell you, this country was made great by disciplined people. And nobody ever amounts to anything who can’t discipline himself. You can either be calm or be upset — it’s up to you. Some people actually make themselves upset. They don’t need to be, but they have made a habit of it for so long that they just are upset. Sometimes this is partly a way of getting sympathy. But it is a miserable way to live.

Don’t ever say to yourself, “I can’t do it.” The minute you say that, you abdicate the greatness of your own personality. If you will take and hold the thought of what you want to be, and hold it and hold it and hold it and meditate on it every day of your life, you can be that. What is your emotional weakness? Would you like to turn that weakness into strength? You can if you want to, if you will think in terms of the strength that will correct the weakness.

I was sitting one night a few years back in the Terrace Restaurant of the Royal Danieli Hotel in Venice, a lovely, idyllic place. The night was balmy. There was a full moon hanging over the Grand Canal. The gondoliers were singing. I was sitting there talking with some restless friends of mine, a hard-driving business executive from New York, a hard-driving Hollywood producer and their equally hard-driving wives. We got to talking about how



peaceful the evening was and what good medicine this was for us. One of my companions, the Hollywood producer, remarked, "We sit here thinking how nice it would be to have emotional control so that tension and anxiety and stress wouldn't bother us. Well, my father was a man who did have just that. He was the most controlled human being I ever knew." Then he told us a little about his father:

"He was forty years of age, however, before he got that self-control. Earlier he was a man of wild, ungovernable temper. I never heard anybody swear and carry on as my father would at the slightest provocation. He couldn't control himself at all. But he didn't want to be that way. As he got on into middle life he took hold of himself and finally conquered his weakness to the point where nothing ever upset him, under any circumstances, no matter what. I asked him about this one time — how he managed to change and acquire all that control. And his answer was simple, yet profound. He said, 'When I feel like flying into a great rage I simply fly, instead, into a great calm.'"

Now are we strong enough to develop this imperturbability or are we going to settle for being weak? Personally, I have a profound admiration for people who make up their minds they are going to have what it takes to develop inner calmness.

I made a speech one time at Pensacola, Florida at the school where they train flyers for the United States Navy. There were about eighteen hundred fine young men in my audience, and I was thrilled by the opportunity to talk to them. That evening I was the Commandant's guest at dinner. And never in my life have I sat in the company of so many high-ranking naval officers. This put me in

an awkward position, because I was weak on protocol and insignia and I found myself calling captains admirals and admirals captains. It's not too serious if you call a captain an admiral, but the other way round it's bad. However, these gentlemen were genial, long-suffering characters.

Well, during dinner we got to talking about this matter of emotional control and how important it is. Among those present was one admiral who in World War II had been commander of the aircraft carrier Essex (I think it was). At one point this carrier had proceeded from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor, loaded with planes that were all gassed up and ready for action. There was reserve gasoline on the hangar deck. And this captain (later admiral, but at that time a captain) was bringing his great aircraft carrier through the roadstead into Pearl Harbor when a merchant vessel started out. They say the roadstead at Pearl Harbor at that time was narrow and for two ships of that size to pass one another safely required skillful seamanship. The tide had to be right, the wind had to be right, everything had to be right. So this captain was on the bridge bringing the aircraft carrier in when suddenly his executive officer dashed up to the bridge and shouted, "There's a fire on the hangar deck!"

Mind you, there is nothing more serious on an aircraft carrier than a fire on the hangar deck. If it got out of control there could be a holocaust. But the captain kept his eye on that merchant vessel coming out with the tide, focusing all his attention on it. The executive officer, thinking the captain hadn't heard him, shouted more loudly, "Captain! There's a fire on the hangar deck!"

Without raising his voice the captain said, "Okay,

I heard you the first time. Put it out." And he eased his vessel into the harbor.

Being much interested, I said to the admiral, "Sir, please tell me how you developed calmness like that. Such a situation would agitate anybody, a big fire on the hangar deck! Even I, a landlubber, know the danger. How could you be so calm?"

"Well," the admiral replied, "I read a Book that you preach about each Sunday, and in that Book it says, 'This one thing I do.' I had to get the carrier past that merchantman and safely into the harbor. I knew that my executive officer, if only he would start using his head, knew how to get that fire out just as well as I did. So I let him take over. There are some people who will not take responsibility unless you make them. I made him take it."

"I know, sir," I persisted, "but how did you develop such inner calmness?"

"How?" he answered. "I cultivated it. That's how. I knew I could never be a good commander of men if I couldn't keep my head in a crisis."

Well, I know that's stern meat, but that's the way it is. You can't be a commander of life unless you learn the great art of keeping your head in any crisis. And how is that done? "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The secret of attaining this much-to-be-desired self-control is the application of practical spiritual principles. The Bible is filled with techniques that are so simple that anybody can understand them. And these, when believed in and applied, will in due course give victory over any lack of self-control or lack of calmness.

Here are the steps: When confronted with a big problem, think. Apply all of your mentality to it. Second,

pray about it, to get God's guidance, because you will never come out right as long as you go wrong. Third, do all you can do about it. Fourth, put it in the hands of God. Let go and let God. Let Him take over and trust Him for guidance and for the outcome. These four things constitute a basic scientific spiritual formula that will work for the great or the simple.

Recently I met a woman and never saw her. Strange, but it came about in this way. I was in a hotel down South and in the morning I called Room Service to order breakfast. I said, "This is room 709 and I am hungry. How about some breakfast?"

"Good morning!" said a woman's cheery voice. "How are you this beautiful day?"

I looked out the window. It was raining pitchforks. "Oh," I said, "I'm all right. How are you?"

"Now," she said, "What's your name?"

"Dr. Peale."

"Oh," she said, "are you Norman Vincent Peale?"

"Well," I said, "I really am."

"I'm so glad to hear from you. Is Mrs. Peale with you?"

"No, unfortunately she is not."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I was excited for a moment. I thought I might meet Mrs. Peale."

"Well," I said, "won't I do?"

"Mrs. Peale has helped me so much. Do you remember that TV program you used to have, where Mrs. Peale and you would answer questions on personal problems?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well," she told me, "I always watched that program. And I thought Mrs. Peale really knew how to answer those questions!"

"How did I do?"

"You did all right too, but I want you to tell Mrs. Peale that something she said changed my life." And she explained: "I was a nervous person. High strung. And I was full of fear. I couldn't handle myself. Things upset me. I had so many problems I just couldn't see my way through them. And on one of those programs your wife said she had had similar experiences. She told what to do about it: 1,2,3,4. And she kept repeating the steps. I copied them down. Then I realized I had been emotion-alizing, but not thinking. That is why I wasn't getting answers. I was trying to get answers with my emotions and not with my head. So," she said, "I decided I was going to stop and think every problem through unemotionally. I hadn't been praying about things, except in a desperate fashion, and really very little of that. And I sure hadn't been leaving anything to God. So I started doing that. It was hard. I couldn't get the hang of it for a while. But finally I did. And I want to tell you that I haven't been upset for a long time."

"Well," I said hurriedly, "that is wonderful."

And there came to my mind the great words, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." That is how to develop the inner calmness we all must have in order to live healthy and effective lives.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks for the wonderful, practical, usable techniques of Christianity which, when applied in our lives, give us victory over weaknesses and difficulties. In this tense, nervous age we need calm self-control for thinking our problems through. Therefore help us now, beginning this moment, to let Thy peace rule in our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.