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SECRET OF COURAGE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

DR. NORMAN VINCENT PEALE
Minister, Marble Collegiate Church
Fifth Avenue at 29th Street, New York



FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING
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SECRET OF COURAGE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Scripture: Joshua 1:9; Romans 8:31, 38-39; Philippians 4:13

I WISH to talk with you today on a great personal human problem, one that affects practically everyone to one degree or another. The topic is *Secret of Courage and Self-Confidence*.

As I stand before a Congregation and study the faces of the modern, competent people before me, the question often arises whether anyone present is afflicted with a lack of courage or self-confidence. It is the mark of a sophisticated, intelligent person to dissemble, that is, not to reveal on his countenance the inner frustrations of his life. So I know that in any congregation, even though it does not appear on the surface, there may be many who are shy, timid, reticent, plagued by self-doubt and feelings of inferiority or struggling with some problem of courage. Throughout the world today this is a general condition.

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Here is a letter written by a young man of whom I know nothing more than what I learn from this letter. It was written in Vietnam. There is no way anyone could possibly identify the young man from what he says about himself; otherwise I wouldn't share it, as that might be embarrassing to him. Here is his letter, written on sheets torn from a ruled writing pad:

"Dear Sir, I have just finished reading a sermon you wrote called *Don't Let Anything Frighten You*. At the end of that sermon you mention the five G's—Guidance, Grace, Guts, Gumption and God. If you believe in the five G's you are not supposed to be scared. But what if you don't have time, like me, just before a fight? Just before a fight I am really scared. I don't know what I am scared of, but I know I am scared. Maybe it's that I will never get to see my friends or loved ones again. Or what they will do to me if they capture me. Or even dying. Am I prepared to meet my God? I don't know which of these things it may be. Maybe it won't be any of them. But the fact is, I am still afraid.

"What could be my problem? Please write me an answer before it is too late. Thank you."

Well, I certainly hope it isn't too late. I pray it isn't too late.

Now what would you have said in reply to this soldier? His is an unusual letter because one thing about men, strange characters that they are, is that they usually don't like to admit they are afraid even though they often are. And sometimes the only thing they can do is just to go on being afraid and hope they can do the job no matter what—the job they've got to do, afraid or not afraid.

Well, the first thing I said in my reply was this: "Dear: (calling him by his first name) I have your letter

and you may be sure of my heartfelt concern. I do not wonder that you are scared when just about to go into action and be under fire. Who wouldn't be? I would."

I didn't think about it at the time, but I could have told him about J. Edgar Hoover, who in my judgment is one of the greatest human beings this country ever did produce — fearless, incorruptible, indomitable, lasting through one Administration after another because he represents the best in American life. J. Edgar Hoover is a real man — a man's man. He is a Christian. He keeps a Bible right on his desk, not to show off, but to read. One time I asked him if he had ever been scared in the old days when he personally led the chase after some of the most vicious killers in the history of crime. I asked, "The time you caught Dillinger outside that theater in Chicago with his guns blazing, were you afraid?"

"Of course I was afraid," he answered. "What man isn't afraid? But we've got to carry on even if we are afraid."

Then I asked, "Did you get over your fear?"

"Yes," he said, "I did." I asked him how — and this is the exact statement he made to me: "I lost my fear in the power of my Lord."

When you come right down to it, that is the only way you can have courage for sure. You have it in the power of your Lord.

So in my reply to this boy over in Vietnam I gave some Bible texts and said that if he would put them in his mind they would help him. His letter didn't indicate whether he was a church-goer back home, but I think very likely he was. I don't know even where he lives. Arkansas? Ohio? Nebraska? California? I don't know. A boy born under the American flag and ready to die for it if necessary — that is all I know about him. So I gave him texts

that he might have heard read from the Bible in a country church almost anywhere in the United States:

"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9) In Arkansas, Illinois, Colorado or Vietnam, God is there.

And I gave him this great affirmation from Romans 8:38-39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." How absolutely tremendous is the Christian faith! Where do you find words like these? Where but in the wisest, sturdiest, most powerful Book that was ever written?

COURAGE and self-confidence are a problem, as I say, for people everywhere. And those of us who are bothered today with little fears or some little lack of confidence might benefit from measuring these against the struggle of an American boy thinking deep long thoughts in the darkness of the night in a rice paddy or steaming jungle in a far-away country.

A certain university put out a questionnaire among 600 students taking courses in psychology and asked them among other things to state what they thought was their most pressing painful personal problem. Seventy percent of them indicated that their worst problem was lack of courage or lack of self-confidence. Associated with Marble Collegiate Church is an organization known as the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, with a clinic that engages in counseling on just about every known kind of emotional problem. For over 27 years this organization

has dealt with these problems. And our leading psychiatrist over most of that period, the late Dr. Smiley Blanton, told me shortly before his death that the chief problem in the religio-psychiatric clinic over a quarter of a century had been the number of people who came to it suffering from inadequacy feelings in the presence of the problems of life.

What, then, is the secret of self-confidence and courage? It hinges on the kind of thoughts you think. If you nurture negative thoughts over a long period of time, you are going to get negative results. If you go along for years telling yourself that you are a worm, that you don't amount to anything, that you can't do anything, your subconscious is going to believe it after a while. Your subconscious is very accommodating. In the long run it will send up to you exactly what you send down to it. If you keep on sending it fear thoughts and self-inadequacy thoughts, that is what it will feed back to you.

It may be that as a child you had experiences which made you doubt yourself, made you shy, withdrawn, reticent, bashful. If you developed such a state of mind as a child you will have it as long as you live and be miserable all your life unless you do what it takes to change all that. What you need to do, of course, is to take charge of your mind and begin to fill it with the healthiest, most powerful, most vital thoughts ever formulated. And where do you find them? In the Bible — that's where you find them. The Bible is full of healing thoughts which, if put into your mind, will change your whole condition and fill you with courage and self-confidence.

FOR example, one evening a long time ago I had made a speech to a big gathering of salesmen — this was in a

civic auditorium — and when the meeting was over I remained on the stage quite a while shaking hands with a lot of people. Over to my left I noticed one man who just stood there waiting. Only when everyone else had gone did he approach me. He was a nice-looking fellow. I judged he was around forty years of age. And he asked, with great intensity: "Can I talk with you a minute?"

Well, there were no chairs — so we walked backstage and sat down on a pile of lumber. "What's the trouble?" I asked.

"I don't belong to this convention," he explained, "but I heard you were going to talk on how to think positively and I crashed the meeting. I'm embarrassed to be taking your time, but frankly I'm desperate. I am here in this city for the biggest deal of my life, coming up tomorrow morning. If I fail, that is the end for me. If I don't put this deal over I am through."

"Now look, my friend," I said, "don't be so dramatic. Let's hope you do carry this business deal off, but if you don't — then tomorrow is another day."

"Oh, but this is my one big opportunity," he insisted. "You mustn't take it so lightly."

"You are too tense, too rigid. In such a state you can't be in full possession of your faculties. Relax. The world is not going to end if you don't put this deal over. Don't get so worked up."

"Well," he said, "I sure would like to know why I always feel so inadequate. I've been this way all my life. Now if my brother had this job to do tomorrow he would put it over."

"Why are you bringing your brother into it? What's he got to do with it?" I asked.

"He was always the smart one in the family," the man

answered. "He's a year younger than I am. When we were in school he always got straight A's. I never got better than a C in any course I ever took."

"What's your brother doing now?" He named the job his brother was doing — a routine little job. "It looks to me as though you are doing bigger things than your brother. Maybe he did get A's at school, but I can tell you this, my friend: I knew men at college who got straight A's and no one has heard of any of them since. On the other hand, some of the men I know who only got C's are now leaders in their communities."

"But what am I going to do? How can I get more confidence?"

"As I see it, there are two things you should have. You need counseling to help you learn why you have this deep inferiority feeling. But," I said, "you also need some first aid things to pull you through this present emergency. I'll give you a couple of those right now. Let's stand up. I can't give you these in a slumped condition. You stand and I'll stand."

"Now," I said, "repeat after me these words: 'I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength.' And I will give you another one: 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' Have you ever heard that before? It's from the Bible."

"No, I never did."

"Don't you read the Bible?"

"No."

"Well, do those words make sense to you?"

"Yes, they do."

"All right, now change the 'us' to 'me' and repeat after me, 'If God be for me, who can be against me?'"

I got him to repeat it several times. I wrote it out on

a card for him. I told him, "Now keep thinking this great thought. Think it as you leave this place and walk down the street. Think it when you get up tomorrow morning. Then go to your appointment in a relaxed manner and tell that man honestly why you think what you have to sell is something he needs."

I remember how he pulled himself up straight and looked at me. All he said was, "Okay, doctor, okay."

As he walked away into the night I stood looking. A rather pathetic figure, I thought. But as he passed under a streetlight I could see him still holding himself very straight and I felt sure he was in good shape for the next day. And the outcome proved that he was.

Later we were able to arrange for some counseling for him. And over a period of time he completely changed the color and complexion of his thinking by putting into his mind great words out of the greatest of all thought-books.

When you come right down to it, the secret of courage and self-confidence is to fill your life with God. Of course you expect me to say that. And you are not going to be disappointed, because I've said it. And why do I say it? Because it's true. You were created by God and He made you right. If you haven't walked with God you are making yourself wrong.

But you can always come back to God and He re-makes you right. What He does is to re-make you in such a way that you no longer are a phony, but honest and real. Anybody who lives a phony life will get a phony result; but if you are honest and real you will get an honest result and a right result and a real one. God makes you yourself. The greatest person who was ever made in this world

is you yourself. And if you try to be something other than yourself you do a bad job. When you are yourself — just the way God made you — real, honest and whole — then courage will flow into you, and confidence, because you are right.

OUR magazine *Guideposts* in the April issue had an article by a fellow named Jim Nabors, about his own life. Jim Nabors is a television actor. He stars as "Gomer Pyle" in a very popular show. This Gomer Pyle is a hillbilly boy who joined the Marines. He is one of the most entertaining characters on the American television screen today, in my humble opinion. I always watch him when I can. His dialogues with a hard-boiled top sergeant are rich indeed.

Now Jim Nabors was born in Sylacauga, Alabama. His father was a policeman, and for a long time in Jim's boyhood his mother worked as a waitress in a truck-stop diner 14 hours a day, 7 days a week. The combined wages of his policeman father and his waitress mother put him through college. Then for quite some time he wasn't amounting to anything — and this bothered him, because his parents had invested so much in him, their very lives. He had visualized himself as one of those super fellows on Madison Avenue who write these ads which are supposed to motivate. He borrowed a little money and moved to New York and went up and down Madison Avenue, but he got turned away by receptionist after receptionist. He couldn't get away from his down-Alabama talk. They laughed him out of court. He decided the thing to do was to get himself a gray flannel suit. He bought himself a gray flannel suit, got himself a haircut in the accepted style, and tried, he says, to develop an Eastern accent. Still he never got past the receptionist's desk. He had to settle

for a job as a typist.

Then he decided that the New York climate didn't agree with him and he went to California. The next thing he knew it was four years later and he was hustling crates at a warehouse in Los Angeles, but still trying to talk with his Eastern accent, still wearing the gray flannel suit, still being a phony.

Then one day he stumbled into a Roman Catholic Church called St. Paul's where a Mass was going on. He didn't understand a word of the Mass (It was still in Latin in those days.); he couldn't make head nor tail of it, but he says he somehow sensed that here was the only thing on earth that really mattered. He began to go to church and to study Christianity. Finally he came to this simple truth, that he should put God at the center of his life and seek to become the completed person God intended him to be. That is the simplest, most basic lesson you can understand. He did this and presently began to feel at peace and very happy. At last he felt honest and relaxed. He began to dress the way he wanted to and do things he liked to do.

Then he heard of a place where amateurs could go and perform in the evening after work. He made up an act for himself and went and gave it and had a good time doing it. The audience seemed to like it and he was asked to come back. One night Andy Griffith was sitting out front and Jim Nabors got signed for a part on Andy Griffith's television program. His article in *Guideposts* ends on this note, that he has no idea how long he will last as Gomer Pyle, but he has lost his fears about himself and is confident he can do in life what God wants him to do.

When you are honest and real and whole, then you have normal courage and normal self-confidence. This is

the secret of courage and self-confidence: let God help you to be yourself.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we pray that every human being may discover this priceless secret of courage and self-confidence, that his life may be rich and full and honest and whole. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL PRAYER NEED?

You are invited to write in confidence about your prayer need, or the needs of others, to the Prayer Fellowship, Foundation for Christian Living, Pawling, New York 12564. Every weekday the prayer fellowship meets at 9:50 A.M. Eastern time to pray by name for those who request it.

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