

The Magic of Believing



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THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

Scripture: Mark 9:23; Matthew 19:26; Acts 1:8; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Malachi 3:10

I want to talk to you today about something that can actually change your life. I call it the magic of believing. Whoever applies the magic of believing to his problems and to his living will have wonderful results indeed.

The mail received by a minister of the Gospel is sometimes most extraordinary. People are likely to write to him about the most intimate concerns of their lives. The subject matter may range over the whole gamut of human experience from drama to tragedy, with comedy in between. Today I have a letter of a somewhat special sort, which I would like to read to you. It intrigues me greatly and I hope it will likewise be interesting to you. It is from another minister, Baptist minister whose church is in California, and it reads as follows:

"I came across another interesting story the other day - about a young man who liked to play the horses. At a local store he came upon a book entitled 'You Can Win' and, thinking it was a tip sheet, he purchased it. Imagine his surprise when he got to the race track and discovered that it was a book by Norman Vincent Peale on how to win in the game of life. He told me that he didn't have any winning horses that day, but that it was the luckiest day he ever had - because through that book he came to know Jesus Christ as his Saviour."

You see, you never know where or how the simple message of the Gospel is going to reach a person. It may be a young man who got it when his attention was diverted from horse racing to a book about the magic of believing, or a man betting on the horses did not pay off, but the magic of believing, if he continues to pursue it, will pay off in dividends beyond compare through all the days of his life.

I call to your attention a text in the New Testament bearing on this point. It is the twenty-third verse of the ninth chapter of Mark and is probably one of the greatest gems of truth you will find in the greatest Book of wisdom in the world. It says, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

Notice that there is an *if* in this. You are offered something tremendous, but there is an *if*. "If thou canst believe," then all things are possible. Believing in the depth to which we are now directing our thoughts is a very hard thing. It requires mental discipline. It requires self-surrender. It requires giving your whole self to it. It isn't something off the top or the surface of your mind. It certainly isn't the glib recital of a creed. But if you can overcome your doubts and your negativisms and really, deeply believe, you will thereby enter into a life transformed, for "all things are possible to him that believeth." This is the magic of believing.

Belief is factual, it is truth. The term "magic" is synonymous with utter wonder. The magic of believing is a manifestation of one of the greatest powers in the universe, the power of thought. By our thoughts we either create or destroy.

You can build your life up by thinking constructively. You can tear your life down by destructive thinking. What

you are this day is the result of what you have been thinking for many, many years. We become what we think. If you would like to know what you will be, let us say, five years from now, you do not need any soothsayer or fortune teller to give you the facts. I can give them to you right this minute. Five years from now you will be precisely what you think over the next five years.

You will be a bigger person then if you think big; you will be a smaller person if you think small. We do not bear in mind nearly enough the creative and the destructive power of thought. Marcus Aurelius wrote, "Our life is what our thoughts make it." Emerson said that a man is what he thinks about all day.

Now thought isn't something that is ethereal. A thought is actually a thing. It has substance. A thought is also alive. "Cut a word," said Emerson, "and it will bleed." That is a picturesque way of saying that a thought is alive. Emerson doesn't mean that literal blood drops are going to come out of the word. But he is saying that if you take a word that is vital and put it with some other vital words to make a thought, then it can cause life or deterioration according to the manner in which you use it.

Suppose, for example, you are a negative thinker - you go around thinking negatively all the time. You are full of negative thoughts from morning until night and you voice them. What are you doing? Something very dangerous: you are activating negatives in the world around you. There is a law that like attracts like. I didn't invent that law; neither did I. But it is there.

So if you send out negative thoughts you activate negative influences in the world through the operation of this law of attraction and you draw back to yourself negative results. There is no other way it could be. On

the other hand, if you send out positive thoughts - bright, resplendent thoughts of faith - this activates positive influences in the world around you and you draw back to yourself positive results.

Suppose you think fearful thoughts, as some people do - anxiety thoughts. These thoughts activate fearsome anxious tendencies in the life around you and you draw back anxiety results to yourself. But if on the other hand you remind yourself, "I am a child of God and God is with me - so I need not be afraid," you will be sending out positive thoughts of courage and faith, and if you keep it up you will draw back to yourself thoughts of courage and of faith. We get what we think. The magic of believing brings back to us the good things which a good God gives.

I was in Charlottesville, Virginia sometime ago. In front of the hotel in Charlottesville is a marvelous statue of Stonewall Jackson, who was in some respects one of the greatest men this country has produced. Once when Stonewall Jackson was planning an audacious campaign in the Shenandoah Valley a timorous general who was one of his subordinate commanders came to the night before a scheduled forward push and said, "General, I'm afraid. I'm afraid that this is an improper deployment of our troops. I'm afraid our strategy is not sound. I fear we're going to lose a lot of men."

The great Jackson put his hand on the shoulder of his timorous general and said, "General, never take counsel of your fears."

If you take counsel of your fears, your fears will reproduce themselves. If you harbor doubts about yourself and your ability and think of yourself as inferior, you will get flowing back of failures and limitations.

It is very serious, friends, how we so often defeat ourselves by our thoughts, when by the magic of believing we could be winning victories.

Years ago I read a statement by the great psychiatrist Karl Menninger which fascinated me. One time a man who had heard me quote this statement in a sermon presented me with a wooden plaque with the words inscribed on it and I keep that plaque in my study. I've had people come in and look at it and want to argue about it. And I've had others come in and be inspired by it. And this is what it says: "Attitudes are more important than facts." You will sometimes hear hard-headed businessmen stress the point that facts are facts. And some people have the notion that nothing is more important than facts. But it just isn't so. The most important thing is not the facts, but your attitude toward the facts.

One man examines a situation and says, "Well, those are the facts. There's nothing you can do about it. The only thing you can do is accept the facts." That is his attitude toward the facts - so the facts defeat him. Another man looks at the situation and says, "Those are the facts, all right, but I never saw a set of facts yet to which there wasn't a solution. Some facts can be changed. And where there is one that can't be changed, maybe I can get around it or under it or over it. Or maybe I can weave that fact into a new pattern and live with it and use it to my advantage." So his attitude toward the facts brings the magic of believing into play and he defeats the facts rather than the facts defeating him. "If thou canst believe ... " If you can only believe, then nothing shall be impossible to you.

One time when I was speaking at a businessmen's convention I talked along this line - which is a theme

I often touch upon because I think it points the way to live victoriously - and after my speech a man came to me and said, rather wistfully I thought, "I only I could believe all that you said about the power of believing."

"Well," I told him, "one way is to practice believing it. And I would suggest you study the passages in the Bible. It's the Bible that tells us that 'all things are possible to him that believeth.'"

"Where is that?" he asked, and I told him he would find it in Mark 9:23. Then he protested, "But you don't know my problems. I've got a lot of trouble. Being a preacher, you wouldn't understand that."

"Say that again, my friend."

"I've got a lot of trouble," he repeated.

I assured him that I shared his feelings about trouble but said that when I feel I am having a hard time I often think of a line from an old Negro spiritual. "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Glory Hallelujah!" Yes, we have trouble; but we also have God. So, Glory Hallelujah! With faith in God we can overcome the trouble.

I finally convinced him to give the magic of believing a try. And what do you think he did? Like many other executives he was accustomed to having boxes on his desk for mail and reports and papers he must deal with. There was a box for incoming items, one for the outgoing and a third labeled "Undecided." The "Undecided" box usually had more in it than the other two boxes put together. But now he got a fourth box and put it alongside the other three and he put on it a label saying, "God All Things Are Possible." And when he found himself faced with a tough problem he'd make a memo of it and throw the memo and any related papers into this box.

There he would leave the matter, believing that when the problem had to have an answer God would supply it. He would pray about the situation and surround it with the magic of believing. Some weeks later he wrote, "It's wonderful the results I get from this box." This may be a very simple, primary-school way to do business. But it demonstrated that believing brings results.

There is a book by a distinguished Canadian chemist which I have kept by my bedside for, I suppose, ten years and frequently pick up and read. It is a book called JUST GO AND LET GOD. You wouldn't think that a distinguished chemist would write a book on this subject, would you? But this one did. His name was Albert E. Cliffe. He was a food chemist, one of the greatest in the Dominion of Canada. He was also a very religious man and conducted a big Bible class in Toronto. "As a chemist," he writes, "I have faith in science, and I can prove it every day. The salt we use so commonly is made up of two deadly poisons; combined in a certain manner they produce a commodity which is absolutely essential for every one of us. This is the magic of believing the laws of chemistry." And he sums up his views on believing in these words: "I am no theologian and I have no desire to break orthodox theology in any university. I simply believe that God is my Father and that I am His son and that my mind is a part of His Divine mind - and by the magic of believing I can be in tune with that tremendous mind of His at any time I choose and, by so doing and by so believing, I can gain the answer to any problem which I have to face."

He goes on to say, "What you get out of religion is entirely up to you. You can make your faith a super atomic formula or you can make it a routine affair without pro-

gress. You can be healed right now and your healing can start at any time regardless of how serious your condition may appear to you, if you will let go your fears and give God His rightful place in your life.

"How can you afford to refuse this same Christ when you see every day in your faith what He can produce? This Christ became a reality to me many years ago; and the freedom from pain, from sickness and from fear which I have had in these intervening years is what I am trying to offer you through the medium of these words today. What He has done for me, what He has done for me, He is willing to give you, if you will try to practice the magic of faith the magic of believing."

I say to you on the authority of the Bible and of human experience that no matter what your problem may be or your difficulty or your defeat, there is enough power in the magic of believing to overcome any or all of it "if thou canst believe." And you believe if you will surrender your life to Him. The magic of believing creates a wonderful power flow. Christianity is a fount of power - of the greatest power in the universe. The Bible is a Book of power, techniques of power, formulas of power. Jesus after His resurrection said to the disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." That was the beginning of the Christian faith, a power promise.

How much power have you? Are you living on a great flow of power or are you living on a miserable little trickle? Do you have a great surging river of power or do you have just a little rivulet that carries you through some things but fails you in others? The law of supply is a great concept. And this law of supply is offered to anybody who will practice the magic of believing.

This doesn't mean that you are going to get rich. Christianity isn't designed to make you rich. Christianity isn't interested in whether you are rich or not. The Bible says "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." You shall have every one of your needs satisfied if you practice the magic of believing.

Not long ago I had the privilege of addressing twelve thousand students at Brigham Young University in Utah. That university is under the auspices of the Mormon Church, and its president is a dynamic man by the name of Ernest L. Wilkinson, formerly a lawyer. Mr. Wilkinson has written a little booklet on tithing and we got to discussing the subject. He says, "I've found that the way to unlock the flow of power is to give." The Bible says, "Bring ye all these into the storehouse . . . and prove me now here with 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." Mr. Wilkinson maintains that the wise people are the people who believe this and who practice this belief. And he tells about a man in Grand Rapids who manufactured furniture.

This man, using the ordinary procedures of business, got into difficulties and practically went broke. He was able to save the factory, but his credit was very thin. The bankers wouldn't loan him money. However, he had a few friends who out of sentiment loaned him enough to get started again. But he said to himself: "Somehow or other things elude me. I haven't got what it takes to do a successful job. I'm failing at some point."

Then he began to pray and read the Bible and he got the idea of tithing - giving ten percent of your income

and your time to the Lord. So when he was ready to start his factory up on a little, thin line of credit, he went to his office and knelt down and said to the Lord, "Lord, this plant, such as it is, is Yours except You now as my Partner and I will give the first ten percent all the rest of my life to You."

He began to make furniture again and he kept giving a part of his money away and as he gave, more money came back to him. Then his credit got better because his results were better and the bankers began to loan him money. They were puzzled because part of the money they loaned him he used in his business part of it he gave away. They said, "That isn't practical." But his business grew and he brought blessings to other people.

As you give you gain, not only monetarily but in all of the more precious blessings of life. The basic spiritual law of the universe, demonstrated by Jesus Christ who gave His life, is that blessings come from giving yourself away. Can you believe this? Have you got what it takes to believe it? If you can believe this, all things are possible.

Try it.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we know this is a fundamental subtle law in the spiritual universe and we know that the spiritual arches over the material universe, for at long last nothing is material, but all things are a demonstration of the spiritual. Grant that we may have the wisdom and the perceptiveness to see into this law governing the flow of power and to employ in our lives the magic of believing which will fill them with wonder and joy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.