

How to Use the Power of Enthusiasm

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Scripture: John 1:4

WHEN the Creator packaged you up as a baby and sent you into this world, He put into your nature the priceless ingredient of enthusiasm. But I'm not altogether sure what He's going to say when you appear finally before Him to give an account of your life. I wouldn't be at all surprised if He were to ask you, among other things, "What did you do with that wondrous enthusiasm I gave you? Did you keep it and step it up? Or did you lose it?"

Huxley remarked that the essence of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age — that is, to carry and maintain through all your life the enthusiasm that was yours from birth. Enthusiasm gives everlasting youthfulness. And one of the greatest functions of Christianity is to reanimate human beings with enthusiasm, so that it

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surges through their minds and souls with a burst of light and life.

Get a concordance of the Bible and look up two words *life* and *light* and count the number of times they appear in the Bible. That will give you some idea of what Christianity is all about. Some people seem to think it is mainly about gloom and piety and duties, and of these it does have much to say, but basically the central words in it are *light* and *life*. The writer of the Gospel of John has hardly started before he states, "In him," referring to Jesus, "was life; and the life was the light of men." When you get Jesus Christ into your life you have life and light, giving you excitement, delight, ecstasy, enthusiasm and, through these, power.

THE wisest man who ever lived in the United States, according to some, was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Certainly Emerson had a large part in setting the tone of the American republic and the American cast of mind from the mid-nineteenth century on. He said, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." All great leaders of men have had it. It sweeps things irresistibly before it. You cannot resist a man who is on fire with enthusiasm.

Directed enthusiasm means controlled energy. William McFee, who wrote in the eighties and nineties, observed, "The world belongs to the enthusiast who keeps cool." The enthusiasm of the man of vision and steadiness is energy under control. Enthusiasm is also part of health, because it takes enthusiasm for the soul to be at full vitality. And enthusiasm is very necessary for meeting the crushing blows and onslaughts of human vicissitudes. A person who has his nature packed full of spiritual enthusiasm is undefeatable. Nothing can crack him.

Nothing can break him. He has resilience.

I once visited a brass foundry. A man showed me how they heated the molten brass to a temperature of 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit. It was heated in huge graflex crucibles. The intense heat made the whole crucible glow incandescently. Then, pointing to a crucible out of which this molten metal had only just been poured and which therefore was still red hot, the man said, "Let me show you something." He took an enormous sledge and, using all his force, smote this red-hot empty crucible again and again. All the effect this had was a few almost imperceptible dents, so resilient and resistant was the graflex at high temperature. Then he showed me a crucible that had been allowed to cool and he took a small hammer, maybe a foot long, and without even using his whole arm, but just with a flex of his wrist, hit this cold crucible a few times — and it shattered into a hundred pieces! "When it's cold," he said, "it's brittle."

And I thought, "People are like those crucibles. When they are full of spiritual fire and enthusiasm nothing in the world can break them. But if they let the spiritual fire and enthusiasm die down within them, then even small blows of circumstance can crack and shatter them."

"Well," you say, "that's fine, it's great. But how do you develop enthusiasm? I just haven't got it."

If you haven't got it I feel sorry for you. But don't wallow in your misfortune, because enthusiasm *can* be got. How do you get it? You get it by the spiritual and psychological activity known as affirmation. We tend to become what we affirm. Affirmation is to take a thought and hold it and affirm it and thereby get the conscious mind so permeated with it that finally it penetrates into

the unconscious — and then you have it, because it has you.

You can make anything out of yourself by affirmation in the name of the Saviour. Suppose, for example, you are full of fear. You're afraid of just everything. How do you go about overcoming that? You say to yourself, "I'm not afraid. In the name of the Lord I have courage now." The immediate effect may seem very weak, but you will have taken the first step: by affirmation. And if you affirm it persistently enough, your conscious mind will get the impression, "He means business. I will accept this thought." And then the unconscious mind tells the conscious mind, "Send it to me and I will make it real." And after a while you are no longer a person full of fear; you're a person of courage. And similarly if you have been dull, dopey, apathetic, indifferent, but now you start affirming enthusiasm, then presently it will come to you. This isn't easy. It takes self-disciplinary determination. It requires perseverance. But with the Lord's help you can do it.

ONE of the greatest books I ever read is by a one-time baseball player. This man, Frank Bettger, wrote a book entitled **HOW I RAISED MYSELF FROM FAILURE TO SUCCESS IN SELLING**. You may wonder why a minister would talk from the pulpit about such a subject. Well, you see, this book contains a chapter which in my humble judgment is a classic — a chapter on the creative power of enthusiasm. At least once a year I reread Bettger's chapter on enthusiasm.

Frank Bettger's experience as a ballplayer was this: He had been playing third base for the Johnstown, Pennsylvania baseball team and was getting a salary of fifty

dollars a week. One day the manager abruptly told him he was fired — for being just too plain lazy. “Whatever you do next,” said the manager, “for heaven’s sake wake up and get some enthusiasm into it. You *could* be a good player. You have good coordination. You have good timing. You have everything except the main thing. You have no enthusiasm. To be a real ballplayer you’ve got to love the game, you’ve got to love the competition, you’ve got to feel the joy of the sport. But you don’t have any of that.”

Well, Frank took the first new job he could get — playing for Chester, Pennsylvania at only a fraction of the pay he had received from Johnstown. This wasn’t exactly calculated to make him feel enthusiastic. However, he decided he had better start *acting* enthusiastic. In three days’ time this had a significant result. An old ballplayer took notice of him, thought he had promise, and persuaded New Haven, Connecticut to give him a try.

This was quite a break, and Frank was determined nobody in the New England league was going to accuse him of being lazy. In his first game for New Haven, with the temperature 100 degrees in the shade, he positively burned up the bases; threw the ball so hard it “almost knocked the infielders’ hands apart,” and at one point when he tried to steal a base and got trapped between second and third, slid into third with so much force that the baseman fumbled the ball and Frank scored a crucial run.

The write-ups of the game in the New Haven papers the next day said this new player has inspired the whole team, nicknamed him “Pep Bettger” and congratulated the manager on picking up this human dynamo. And it wasn’t long before Frank Bettger found himself in big

league baseball, playing third base for the St. Louis Cardinals.

After two years with the Cardinals Bettger injured his arm, unfortunately, and had to give up baseball. Later on he went into selling life insurance. And in life insurance likewise he burned up the bases and became one of the greatest life insurance salesmen of his generation. And in his chapter on the power of enthusiasm he writes, “To become enthusiastic, *act* enthusiastic.”

WHAT are you doing with your life? In what state of mind do you go to the office on Monday morning? Better still, in what state do you get out of bed on Monday morning? Do you get out of bed with many groans? Do you inspire your wife by saying gloomily, “It’s another of those days,” and then go moping to your office? Maybe you ask yourself, “Why in the world did I ever get into this job anyway?” So depressiveness settles down upon your life. Remember that God put enthusiasm into you and Jesus Christ wants to activate it. The purpose of Christianity is to make you and me live, live here and now, mentally and spiritually, yes and even physically, so that our lives are dynamic — until the day our bodies die and our spirits, which do not die, move heavenward in life eternal.

You don’t want to go crawling on hands and knees through life! Get Jesus into your heart. Just observe people who have Jesus in their hearts. Why, you’ll find they are so full of life they can hardly contain it. They have life and light. Think Jesus, think God, think enthusiasm, affirm it, live as though you have it and you’ll have it. And when you have it you’ll have power.

Another way to go at developing enthusiasm is to

practice being excited about the world we live in, to practice being thrilled by the world. Does the world thrill you? Or is it always just the same old world to you? Why, you can't walk down the street without seeing something fascinating! Above you is the sky; it's full of fascination. Look into human faces; they're fascinating. Everything is vibrant and alive to the person who is vibrant and alive. Cultivate a great love of the world.

ONE of my very good friends of many years, well known to many of you, no doubt, is Lowell Thomas. Now Lowell, though a man of quiet, modest personality, is one of the world's greatest adventurers. If I were to make a list of great adventurers from Marco Polo to the present time I'd certainly have to put Lowell Thomas in the list. He has been everywhere; he has seen everybody. Yet not so long ago he said to me, "There's a great urge in me, Norman. I've got business in far places."

"You've already been everywhere!" I exclaimed.

"Well," he said, "I haven't yet hunted wild horses on the Arabian steppes."

I once asked him where he got all this enthusiasm and he answered, "I got it from my father." This did not surprise me, for I knew his father Dr. H. G. Thomas, a physician. Dr. Thomas had such indefatigable zest and interest and enthusiasm that he took courses at New York University when he was eighty-five. When I asked him why at his age he was still going to college he replied, "Because I've found out how little I know. It's a tremendous world and I want to know all I can about it."

In Lowell's youth the family lived in Colorado, high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Blood of Christ Range. They could see a hundred and fifty miles from

their front door. Lowell's father used to get him up at night to see some phenomenon in the heavens. And he would say to him, "Listen, son, for the voices calling you from beyond the Sangre de Cristo." And Lowell says he did hear those voices, calling him to adventure.

I'm mighty thankful that I too grew up in a home that was packed full of enthusiasm. My father was a preacher and at no time while I was growing up did he ever have a salary of more than four thousand dollars a year. A dollar went further then than it does now, of course. But my father's income was minimal even for those days. And he had three boys to clothe and educate, too. We never had any money. But we didn't need money — we had something else. We had zest for life, enthusiasm, born of the love of Jesus Christ. God was in our home and invested it with sparkle and glory.

My mother lived much of her life in southern Ohio, down around Cincinnati. There are little hills in that country, pretty hills, but just little ones. My mother used to say, "I've lived among little hills or on flat plains all my life. I've never seen a real mountain. I've wanted to see mountains. Norman," she would say, "I hope when you get older you'll see a mountain someday." And I'll never forget the first time I did see a mountain. It was Mount Monadnock in New England, not a big mountain, but how well I remember the sight of it outlined against the blue sky. Later on I saw the great massif of the Rocky Mountains near Denver and climbed Pike's Peak. My wife says, "You never climbed Pike's Peak. I was with you. We went up in an old car." Well, I got to the top of it anyway and saw the view from there. And still later came the unforgettable day when I first saw the glorious Alps. There is nothing in this world more beautiful to

me than the Alps. The minute I saw the Alps I felt at home, as in the homeland of the soul.

Well, my dear mother has been in heaven now for more than twenty-five years, but I can still see the sparkle in her eyes and the glow on her face and hear the timbre of her voice as she told me, "Norman, love the world, its beauty and its people, and keep Jesus in your heart." I believe anybody trying consistently to follow that simple course will be blessed with abundant enthusiasm and have a life full of joy.

So study your mental attitudes. If you need to be released from depressive thoughts of inferiority, or prejudice, or guilt, turn to the great Physician who can heal you if with all your heart you really seek Him. He keeps office in the Holy Book. He can set you free from your accumulated restrictive, constricting thoughts and attitudes, so that enthusiasm will surge up within you with a burst of power. Wouldn't you like to have that happen to you? Well, it can.

I CLOSE with this: Some years ago there lived in Canada a small boy who was born with a withered leg. From infancy he had to wear a brace. He could only watch other boys running and playing and climbing trees; he could not run or climb. He felt inferior and began to have a low opinion of himself, hobbled as he was by that miserable brace and shriveled leg. But his French-Canadian father said to him, "Son, don't worry about your leg. Someday I'm going to take you over into the cathedral. We'll kneel at the great altar and we'll ask God to heal you. And He'll heal you.

So one day they dressed in their Sunday best (as people used to say in the old days) and went to the cathedral.

And as they knelt at the altar the father said, "Pray, son, and ask Jesus to heal you. He healed people in the long ago and He can heal you if you will believe."

The boy bowed his head and prayed, "Dear Jesus, heal me, please. I believe." When he had finished his short prayer he looked up. His father was still praying. Then his father lifted his face. Years later the man who had been that boy said, "I'd seen my father's face under many circumstances, but I never saw him like that — so beautiful. There were tears in his eyes and, shining through them, joyous faith, like sunlight through rain. It was the exalted look of a true believer."

Then the father stood up, saying, "Son, let us give thanks to God. He has healed you." The boy stood up and looked down at himself. But there was his withered leg, just the same as before. They started down the aisle, the little old brace tumping along as usual. The boy was deeply disappointed.

But as they approached the cathedral door something happened. "I felt tremendously warm and happy in my heart," he said of it long afterwards. "It was as though a great hand passed across my head. It was light as a feather, but there was power in its touch. And all of a sudden I felt free. Boy though I was, I knew what had happened. God had answered my prayer. He hadn't taken the brace off my leg. He had done what was infinitely more important: He had taken the brace off my mind. And from then on the brace on my leg was insignificant." Enthusiasm and a delight in life characterized this man all through the years.

What God did for him, He can do for you and me.

We wear the braces we forge in life by our undisciplined unhealthy attitudes. So ask Him to heal you, and believe, and you will live with the power of enthusiasm all your life.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, set us free from every wrong attitude and thought that has imprisoned us and dulled our spirits. Lord, You meant that our spirits should be alive and vital, gloriously enthusiastic. Give us, dear Lord, today this burst of new life and light and power. And may we transmit it, a marvelous blessing, to others through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Recommended Reading

LET GO AND LET GOD,

Steps in Victorious Living, by ALBERT E. CLIFFE

(Prentice-Hall, \$3.95)

Dr. Cliffe assures us that all the problems life can throw at us may be mastered. Within each of us is the key to peace of mind, hope, courage and a glorious outlook on life. If we will only Let Go and Let God, we can climb the steps to victorious living. All depends upon our laying our problems at God's feet in complete faith that with love, understanding, and forgiveness He will work the cure of our problems—spiritual or physical.

I have had more help from this book than any other, and am sure you will be rewarded by reading it.

Good Reading!

Wm. Vincent Paul