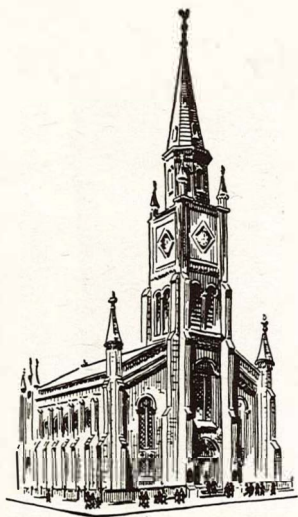


A Good Day Every Day



DR. NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH

FIFTH AVENUE AT 29th STREET • NEW YORK 1, N. Y.

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A GOOD DAY EVERY DAY

Scripture: Psalm 118:24

It could be just possible that this sermon won't amount to much. But one thing is sure: I have a good text. And, believe me, many an average sermon has been saved by having a good text. And mine today is outstanding. In fact, it's a combination of words which, taken into consciousness and made a rule of life, can change your life. Here it is, from Psalm 118, verse 24: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." If you will take that text and build your life around it, then every day, come what may, can be a good day.

It is strange and sometimes sad what life does to people. But even more strange and more sad is what people do to life. Life is a gift of God. It is a tremendous privilege to live. When you handle life with skill, it becomes a fabulous experience. And some people make it so. But unhappily there are many poor souls who certainly do foul it up. And all that you need to do to appreciate this tragic fact is to read the daily newspaper, for therein you will find in capsule form the story of people who took this precious gift and messed it up.

I have two clippings which I saved. One is the story of a poor little unhappy eighteen-year-old girl who hanged herself. She left this note: "A year ago, exactly, I made a sort of bargain with God or fate and this is my part of the bargain. I agreed that if something didn't happen in the

past year to make life worth living, I'd quit living. That wasn't asking too much, but I didn't get it. Please don't think this is something brought on by late events. Suicide is a coward's way out, so I'm a coward. I just don't have the courage it takes to go on just existing."

So the poor little thing, not having any guidance, not having built her life around anything, put a noose around her neck and ended her life at eighteen. Sad, isn't it?

Then here is the other clipping—from the same newspaper, incidentally. It is headed "Ex-Chicago Banker Kills Self in West." The dispatch is from Las Vegas, Nevada, and it reads: "A note requesting that no members of his family be allowed to attend his funeral and asking that a local night club entertainer be engaged to sing 'Good Bye Girls—I'm Through' at nonreligious funeral services was found today with the body of _____, former Chicago banker, in a hotel here.

"Mr. _____'s body was found in the bathroom of a hotel suite he engaged six days ago. He had been shot through the head and a .38 caliber revolver was on the floor beside the body. He was the former vice-president of _____ Bank in the city of Chicago.

"The note was addressed to the Bunker-Burke mortuary of Las Vegas and was tacked on the outside of the closed door of the bathroom. With the note was a placard reading, 'Do not enter. Notify the Bunker-Burke mortuary.'"

Well, there you have an eighteen-year-old girl with everything before her and a fifty-six-year-old businessman who had risen to the apex of material success. Neither of them had been smart enough to heed the answers which Jesus Christ gives, which could have made life endlessly wonderful for them. Now fortunately, there are not many who descend into such extremes of failure. But here, there

and everywhere even in our great American culture there are those who, while they may have achieved certain satisfactions, still find no great meaning in their lives, no deep, throbbing joy, no sense of greatness in what they are or what they do, who find life—to quote *Hamlet*—"stale, flat, and unprofitable."

Not long ago, for example, I spent a couple of days at a beautiful resort hotel—exquisite place, marvelous grounds, the building itself an architectural gem, the service impeccable, the furnishings the finest that modernity can provide, the meals delicious and served to the strains of a string orchestra. The prices, understandably, are rather high; a couple of days in this elegant establishment was about as long as my funds would hold out. Well, being acquainted with the manager, I remarked to him, "It must give you a lot of satisfaction to run a beautiful place like this—to live in these exotic surroundings all the time and also know you are contributing to the comfort and pleasure of so many people. It must be very rewarding."

"Would you think so?" he replied. "I am fed up with it. I've often asked myself, 'Was I born only to do this?' Just what do I do? Let's face it, I run a too-comfortable place for too-comfortable people. I make things soft for the pleasure of soft people. I facilitate their eating too much food and drinking too much liquor. Is this what I was born for? How, in this line of work, am I to get some real meaning into my life?" And the intensity of his feeling, was considerable.

Everywhere I encounter people like this.

For example, I was speaking one night to an audience consisting of about a thousand salesmen plus a goodly sprinkling of salesmen's wives. The place was a big banquet hall, the occasion a convention of sales executives—

nothing to do with any religious organization. And I was sitting at the speakers' table alongside of the chairman, and on my right was the chairman's wife. Now the chairman's wife was about thirty-five years old, a very well dressed, very stylish, very attractive lady. But I could see that she was edgy. She didn't seem to be filled to overflowing with ecstasy at the privilege of sitting next to me. In fact, it seemed to bother her some.

However, I was having a very good time with the others at the table. We got to telling stories and got into a gay and jovial mood. I pulled out some of my old, threadbare jokes—and they went over like balloons. And when someone else told a real good one I would hit the table and say, "That's great!" Finally the lady on my right said to me, "You know, I get the impression you're happy."

"I'm glad it shows," I replied.

"Well," she informed me, "this is the first time in my life I was ever this close to a preacher. And," she added, "I must say I shrank from the experience. But here I am."

"Well, what do you know about that!" I exclaimed.

"Now," she pursued, "are you really as happy as you sound? You must be a throwback from something else. What were you before you were a minister?"

"Why do you ask?" I continued. "Is it because I'm happy?"

"Yes," she said, "that seems strange."

"You think that is strange? Lady, the only strange thing around here is the conception you have of a minister—and for that matter of Christianity. What do you think Christianity is? Some big, soggy wet blanket laid down upon people's spirits? An undertakers' association? Something repressive, something dull, something gloomy? Why, you ought to do some reading. You ought to read what ob-

servers said about the early Christians. They ran out of words trying to describe them. They said there seemed to be something in these people akin to the song of skylarks and the babbling of brooks. Christianity finally captured the ancient world because something dynamic was handed from heart to heart and swept like hallowed fire across the world. It was alive, it was leaping, it was happy." And I asked the woman, "Where in the world have you been all your life?"

"I guess I haven't been anywhere, for I certainly never found anything like that. But," she added "if I did, I would go for it."

"Well," I said, "it's right here for the taking." And I think I made a little progress with this lady who was so bewildered at the idea that Christianity could be happy. Clearly she had never experienced the state of mind affirmed in that marvelous text, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

I also told her about a dinner I went to in Hollywood one time. It was quite a party: there were motion-picture stars and there were several preachers—quite a mixture. And I was proud of the fact that even though there were some screen comedians present the best stories told at that dinner were by the preachers. I am not referring to my own poor jokes, either. But three or four of the preachers were really going strong, and they had these Hollywood people fascinated by their sheer exuberance. A very famous actress, whose name you would know if I were to mention it, finally remarked, "You sure are a crowd of gay lads. It just couldn't be, could it, that some of you sneaked a little intoxicant before you came here?"

And they laughingly protested that this wasn't the case. But one elderly minister, his face simply glowing, looked

at the young actress and said, "Yes, honey, you're right. We *are* intoxicated, every one of us. We have quaffed spirits which lift your spirits, which keep you intoxicated all your life. We are intoxicated with the lilting power of the Spirit."

Then her eyes became misty and there was a wistful look on her face as she said, "I get you, sir. I get you. I am sure that what you're talking about is the greatest thing in the world."

There are so many of the dull, formalistic, dour kind of Christians that it is hard to get the real idea across. There are so many Christians from whom nothing flows when you meet them that I'm sure some people must doubt what I'm saying. But, thanks be to God, there are an increasing number of Christian men and women who really get the zest of it, who get so close to Jesus Christ that they're infused with it. They are the ones who understand the meaning of the affirmation, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

Every day can be a good day. Ah, but some "realist" objects, "Wait a minute! You know that there is variety in our days and you're just bound to have some bad days."

To be sure, as Longfellow wrote:

Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

That is true. But just what is wrong with rain? And just what is wrong with some darkness in a day? Of course there are going to be hard days. There will even be tragic days. But the important thing isn't whether you have dark days. It's what you do with the dark days. The important thing isn't whether you have hard, tragic experiences. It's what you do with the hard, tragic experiences.

I'll venture the assertion that if in every difficulty you will look for good you will find it. Sometimes you've got to struggle to find it. This is the subtlety of life that many people do not understand. Something they call "bad" happens to them. And to them it's just bad. They don't say to themselves, "Almighty God has buried something good in this. I'm going to find it." But the person who searches does find it, and later he looks back at that day which he said was a bad day and knows it was a good one. Every day *can* be a good day.

Let me close with this incident: Some time ago I was staying briefly at a hotel in New England and I went to the local Rotary Club to make up my attendance. I walked a man whom I'd known for years, though I hadn't realized he had re-located in that town. And he greeted me like a long lost brother. "Bill, they're trying to get me to make a speech."

"Oh," he said, "that's ridiculous. Norman, you just keep quiet, if you can. And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make the speech."

"Bill, I'd love to hear you." And when the time came for the speech this man stood up and gave one of the greatest talks I ever heard. It was his own story.

Bill had been president of a small bank in New York State—in Westchester. He drew a good salary. It was a good niche and he thought in terms of being in it until retirement. But then a certain local clique got control of the bank and threw Bill out in order to put one of their cronies in his place.

For days afterwards he walked the streets in a rage. He hated the men who had done this to him. He vowed to get even with them if it was the last thing he did. And by nursing his hatred he imperceptibly developed a resentful

attitude toward everybody. He got to hating life and hating himself.

Meanwhile he started looking for another job, but nothing opened to him. Being in and out of New York City a lot, he came to services at Marble Collegiate Church a couple of times, then said he would like to have a talk with me. When I saw him he told me bitterly, "I don't understand why I haven't been able to get a position anywhere. I'm well qualified. I'm not old enough for age to be an obstacle. I have a lot to offer."

Well, I didn't have to be too smart to know that hate was doing something to his personality that could make men shy off him when approached about openings. "People unconsciously pick up this sort of thing," I told him. "They sense there is something wrong. I don't think you're going to get very far, Bill, until you get this hatred out of your system."

After thinking this over for a minute Bill said, "Maybe you're right. But how do I get over it? That was the worst day of my life those double-crossers gave me. How can I help but hate them?"

"Pray it away," I suggested. "It works—Try it and see. Pray for the men who ousted you and sincerely forgive them."

"What! Pray for those so-and-so's!"

"Yes," I said, "you've got to pray for them. You're a Christian, aren't you? Ask the Lord to help you forgive those men and start wishing them well. It's not easy, but it's the one way to overcome your difficulty."

Well you know, when a real man is fighting a battle he gets a result. It's only the willy-nillys that don't get results—because they don't make the right efforts. And Bill was a strong man. And though this was a hard prayer, he

prayed it. He didn't get the result all at once—I can't tell you that. He had to keep on praying, but the day came when his hatred lifted.

Not long after, he was offered and accepted a subordinate position in a bank in New England. And he was of such a spirit now that he was able to make himself extra valuable to this bank. He rose to the top and became its president.

That day at the Rotary Club he said, "At the time I thought the day when I was fired from my old bank was the worst day of my life. But actually it turned out to be one of the best days. If it hadn't been for that day I would not be here now—where I'd rather be—and, perhaps more important, I'd have missed the discoveries about life which I made through having to fight and win a battle with my own bitterness and hate."

When some dark, hard day comes to you, stand off and take a look at it, think of Jesus and say to yourself, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Then rip its difficulty apart, for somewhere in it you will find the bright good which Almighty God laid up there for you. It's a deep truth, built into the essence of life itself. Every day can be a good day if each day you place yourself under the guidance of Jesus Christ our Lord and our Saviour.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for all the days You have given us. We are sorry that we have messed so many of them up, that we have failed to find treasures in the difficulties. But here we have this day and tomorrow and the next day. Grant, O Lord, that we may demonstrate in our living that every day, be it dark or sunlit, can be a good day. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dr. Peale will preach in the pulpit of Marble Collegiate Church, Fifth Avenue at 29th Street, New York City each Sunday until late August, 1965. There are two services . . . at 9:45 A.M. and 11:15 A.M. The church is fully air-conditioned.



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