



# SEVEN WORDS CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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Fifth Avenue at 29th Street, New York

*Published by*  
FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING  
Pawling, New York

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*Scripture: Matthew 24:35; Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:2  
John 10:10; Acts 17:28*

SEVEN words can change your life. In case this statement stretches your credulity, as well it might, I remind you of the immense power of words. Ralph Waldo Emerson said of someone else's writing, "Cut these words, and they would bleed." This is his dramatic way of expressing his enthusiasm. And it reflects the important fact that a word can have vitality; it can actually be alive.

Jesus had great faith in the power of words. He said — and it is an astonishing claim — "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." And why will they not? Because they are based on fundamental truth and therefore are alive.

When I say that seven words taken together in combination can change your life, I am saying that a new

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This is a recorded transcription of a sermon delivered extemporaneously by Dr. Peale at Marble Collegiate Church.

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creative and dynamic idea that seizes you, takes hold of you, dominates you, can change your life completely, lifting you from one level to a much higher level.

An American thinker of our century who was highly aware of the power of words was William Lyon Phelps, for many years professor of English at Yale, in his day an influential personality in this country, a kind of intellectualized Will Rogers. William Lyon Phelps once stated that in his opinion the six greatest words in the English language, outside of Holy Writ, were these words from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "To be, or not to be . . ." The passage goes on to say, "that is the question." And it's a question everyone should ask himself once in a while. "To be, or not to be: that is the question."

Sometime ago I read or heard the assertion that there are six words which can make any business successful — or which explain why any business does succeed. These six words can also serve to explain why any church succeeds, or any individual. Just six words. Here they are: "Find a need and fill it." Any businessman who has found a need, and who fills it, is bound to succeed. Any church that finds a need and fills it is bound to succeed. Any individual who finds a need and fills it is likewise bound to succeed.

BUT the seven words I have in mind which can change your life are from Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor, one of the wisest men of all ages. Here they are: "Life is what our thoughts make it." St. Paul says substantially the same thing: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." And what kind of renewing? St. Paul supplies the answer. It is the great secret that Christianity has given people across the centuries, chang-

ing them from desultory to vital, from dead to alive, from weak to strong, from dull to alert. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . ."

Now what your present circumstances in life may be I do not know — whether you are sad, whether you are depressed, whether you are nervous, whether you are afraid, whether you are mixed up, whether you are sick or weak or deteriorating physically, spiritually or mentally. But I will tell you this — in the name of Jesus Christ, I tell you this: If you change your thoughts you will change your life.

It is not easy to change your thoughts, for ways of thinking become habits. Then how do you do it? You receive Jesus Christ into your mind. When you have Jesus in your mind all old dead, tired, listless thoughts are eliminated. You become alive. You are changed. Get your mind filled with zest again, get it filled with eagerness, get it filled with excitement, get it filled with romance, get it filled with the glory of God, and there will be a glory upon you like you never knew before.

You are what goes on in your thought processes. If you want to live a wonderful life, think wonderful thoughts. If you want to live a strong life, think strong thoughts. If you want to live a happy life, think happy thoughts, good thoughts. Let your thoughts change and your life will change. By how you think you can even change the impact of sickness, physical deterioration, aging. Probably you have never heard much about this in the orthodox Christian churches, and more is the pity. Some people have the notion that Christianity is solely ethical, or social, or theological, or sacerdotal, or something. It is all these. Christianity is life, friends. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life . . ." And if

you are going to have life, you have to cope with illness and deterioration and aging — aging in the mind, aging in the spirit, aging in the physical body. And how you think has an important bearing on it.

I WAS in Ohio recently and got to thinking about my boyhood days. I remembered one time at college when I was sick. I'd been eating green apples. That was a bad thing, eating green apples, and I suffered for it. I called a doctor. He came and poked around at me and asked me what I had been doing. He gave me some peppermint or something and said, "You just take that and quit eating green apples and you will be all right." I can see this man yet. He was a big fellow. Old Doc James, he was called; and he smelled like every drug store you have ever been in; and he had a great big hand. I remember he put his hand on my head and said, "Son, I can cure your stomach. That is easy. But if you get bad thoughts in your mind, it will take a greater doctor than I am to cure you. So don't let bad or sick thoughts get in that head of yours."

You can do terrible damage by thinking sick thoughts, and so many of us do just that — sick thoughts about ourselves, sick thoughts about other people. There was another doctor who told me of a case he had treated. The patient wasn't too sick; — certainly not fatally. However, the family was in a tizzy, in a dither. The patient was cared for at home. The doctor told me it would have been a lot better if this patient had been in a hospital, because trained nurses don't get into a tizzy. The family kept hovering over him, murmuring, "Oh, dear. Oh, dear."

The doctor, coming into the sickroom one bitter cold day, with a forty-mile gale blowing, threw open all the



windows. "What are you doing, doctor?" they all gasped.

"I am fumigating this room of the fear thoughts and sick thoughts that are all around my patient. I am going to get this room so there are only pure thoughts in it. I wish all of you would go outside and sit down and practice thankful thoughts and think about health. Then I think we will pull your loved one through."

"But suppose he had been seriously sick," I said. "Would that have applied?"

"I can only tell you," the doctor answered, "that having practiced medicine for forty years I know that if I have right thinking on my side I have a tremendous ally. The mind is what mainly determines the condition of the body."

MY wife recently called my attention to an article that said, "Scientists believe that living cells have within them the elements of continuous life. Some scientists wonder why human beings do not live longer, because potentially they have the power to live longer." Now time was when Americans used to think if they could get as far as their thirties they were doing pretty well. You were old at forty. Lincoln when he went to Washington to be inaugurated asked the people of Springfield to pray for him — he observed that he had grown up in the community from childhood to young manhood, but now was "an old man." He was fifty-two when he said that.

Since those days average longevity has been constantly increasing, until now, I understand, the average for women is seventy and the average for men is about sixty-six. Well, if the average can be raised to that point, why can't it be upped ten years more, twenty years more, thirty years more, forty years more? One obstacle certainly is

that we have a conception that at a certain time in life we inevitably begin to deteriorate. You just pick up that attitude. The boy of twenty doesn't have it, nor does the man of thirty; but when the man gets to be forty he says, "You know something? I am going down the other side of the hill." Then at fifty he says, "You know? I am about half-way down the hill." When he is sixty he says, "Boy, I'm on the skids now for sure." And industry doesn't help by telling him at sixty or sixty-five that they can't use him any more. He has had it. So then he gets a watch and is put out to pasture like an old horse. He hangs around for a few more years and then he takes off.

Now that isn't the way Almighty God meant it to be, I am sure. In Him, the Bible says, "We live, and move, and have our being." And it doesn't say only until you are sixty or seventy years old, at all. If you think with Jesus, indestructible Jesus the Eternal, you tend to bring into yourself the indestructible and the eternal. Then even if your body does ultimately like an old dried leaf fall off the tree, your soul and your mind are eternally useful, youthful, alive and vigorous.

I REALLY think we ought to give more reflection to what by thought power we can do with ourselves. The other day a man was telling me about his father. The older man lived to be ninety-six years old and was well and vital until just a few months before he died. Then, like the one-horse shay that lasted for almost one hundred years, his physical body went to pieces and he died. Now when this man was fifty years old a strange thing had happened to him. He began to realize that he was accepting the American tendency to be old-age-conscious. His legs had become a little tottery; he felt weary, tired; his whole

being was undergoing a letdown.

So what did he do about it? He went to Jesus. He prayed and asked Jesus if he should deteriorate. And he seemed to get the answer that he should not. So he did a strange thing. He knew that somewhere deep within him was the life center. And he talked to his life center. "You, life center, were created by the Eternal God who never runs down. I have been letting you, life center, sag. So I want to tell you that I now repudiate this devil called old age. I hereby affirm, in the name of Jesus, immortality now. I want you, life center, to send up a stream of life through my being."

He did this daily. Many times daily. And the effect was like a thin little trickling stream at first, but gradually it surged up until it took charge of him. And at ninety-six he was straight and vigorous, his cheeks were full, his skin was pink, and there was life in his eyes, in his speech, in his step, and he became an inspiring influence touching the lives of thousands of people because he had found something that lies at the heart of the universe and at the heart of the individual: the life force.

Why don't you start saying that to yourself? Take a look in the mirror. You may see gray hair, wrinkles around the eyes. There is nothing wrong with gray hair; it blends in with your changing complexion. But don't let your spirit get gray. That is the main thing. Say to yourself that you are a child of God and are going to affirm the life force. You see, God wants you to live and be vital because He wants you to do something for the world — and you will never do it if you regard yourself as old and feeble, inadequate and incapable. "Life is what our thoughts make it."

"Well," you say, "I know, but how would that apply

to anything other than my physical condition? What is this anyway, a discussion on how to be well?"

That is right, that is what it is. Too long too many churches abdicated the question of how to be well. The true church is concerned with the whole man: body, mind and spirit. And does this idea of changing your life by your thoughts apply to your status in life? Your job? Your business? Your material success? Does it affect your ability to live effectively? Does it apply to personal relationships? The answer is, "Yes, it does."

You can change your life in any aspect by changing your thoughts about that aspect. Montaigne, the great French philosopher, said, "Men are tormented by their own opinions of things, and not by the things themselves." That is to say, if things go wrong with you, that isn't the important thing. The important thing is what do you think about that which goes wrong with you. If you think defeat, you will get defeat. If you think victory, you strongly tend to get victory.

THE other day I had a letter from an old friend of mine, a lady who lives in Mississippi. The people in her community all call this lady "Miss Lou," and they pronounce it with that delicious southern accent which a Yankee can't quite imitate. Miss Lou is a sweet little thing, very small; but not small in mind or heart. Some years ago I was making some speeches in Birmingham and other places in Alabama, and I was at a place called Point Clear. This woman came to see me and said, "I have been reading some of your things. I can't get anywhere with them. My husband always took care of me. I never knew anything about business and I thought my husband would provide for me so that when he died I wouldn't have to

worry. But his estate was eaten up, there is practically nothing left and I am up against it. I've got to go to work or else go on relief. This is a bad state for a gentlewoman to be in."

This sounds a little old-fashioned, this "gentlewoman" business; that is the way it used to be down South. There were certain people who were gentlefolk — that is, they never worked unless they had to. A gentlewoman was supposed to be in the home, cared for, nicely dressed, daintily perfumed, and she was not supposed to do any work.

Well, Miss Lou said to me, "I just don't know what to do, and I've got to do something. How would you suggest that I make my life creative?"

Well, I didn't know what to suggest. So I said, "What do you say, Miss Lou, we pray about it?" So we had a prayer. At the end of the prayer, I said, "Have you any ideas now that are different from those you had before we prayed?"

"No," she said, "I just listened to you pray and that is all there was to it."

"Well," I said, "the idea of praying is not just to listen to what somebody says. It is to ask the Lord for an insight or an idea. I guess we had better pray again." And we prayed again. And I prayed, "Lord, give us an insight for Miss Lou." At the end of the prayer I asked, "Miss Lou, did you get an insight?"

Again she said, "No." And she asked, "Did you?"

"Yes, I did," I replied, "but it was just that I should ask you some questions. So let's see. Can you paint?"

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Pictures?" I nodded.

"No," she said, "I can't paint a picture."

"Can you cook?"

"I never cooked a meal in my life. We always had a cook."

"How about arranging flowers? Can you arrange flowers?" Again the answer was no. "Can you sew?" No, they had always had a seamstress.

"Well," I said, "since you have to face the hard realities, you can go to one of the shops in this town and get a job as a clerk."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "can you see me as a clerk?"

And it was hard to picture, I had to admit. I was baffled. But finally I hit on it. I asked, "Can you make candy, by any chance?"

"Now that is something I can do," she answered. "But where would that ever get me?"

"Why," I reminded her, "people consume millions of pounds of candy. If you can make homemade candy and keep the homemade touch in it even as your business grows in volume, you are bound to make money. I tell you what to do. Go home and make some candy and put a sign on your lawn saying you have candy for sale."

"Oh! What would my neighbors think?"

"Who cares what they think?"

"Why I would give them the candy."

"You'd better come up North," I told her, "and become a Yankee. No Yankee would ever give candy away. You ought to get into the free enterprise system."

"Oh," she said, "I don't think I could ever do that. Anyway, I don't think my candy is that good."

"I tell you what to do," I persisted. "You go home and make me a pound of it. Send it to me."

Actually she sent me a two-pound box — and because I have such enthusiasm for my pastoral duty I ate the whole two pounds. It was marvelous candy. So I wrote



her saying, "Get busy merchandising that candy."

Well, if you go to Edwards, Mississippi you will find a beautiful shop there called *The Sweetest Spot on Highway 88*. And little Miss Lou, having lifted herself out of her inadequacy because she learned to think creatively, has been the recipient of public honors. First she was named Woman of the Year in Mississippi. Then the United States Chamber of Commerce two or three years ago named her one of the seven most creative Americans of the year. Little Miss Lou found that by thinking creatively she could change her life. Then she thought in terms of service and became a great influence for good in the area where she lives.

It's all in your thinking. What do you want to be? What do you want to do? Let Jesus Christ lift from your mind the thoughts of defeat and weakness and doubt and let great powerful thoughts of faith surge in, and you too may be transformed by the renewing of your mind. These seven words can change your life: "Life is what our thoughts make it."

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, help us to see ourselves as children of God, not weak, not restricted. Help us to see ourselves, regardless of what we have ever been, as creative people made so by Thee. Help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And for this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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