



By The Rev. NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

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Call from a Stranger

MY MOST INSPIRING MOMENT

This noted clergyman-author
was about to quit the ministry when he
received a middle-of-the-night plea
from an unbeliever whose daughter was dying

THERE HAVE BEEN many inspirational moments in my life, some of which have been re-created in Frank Ross' biographical film, "The Story of Norman Peale," and in my book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

But, ironically, it was the great success of that book which caused me my greatest suffering—and led to the most inspirational moment of my life. Because of what I said in the book, I was accused of sugar-coating religion. And since the most vitriolic and hostile reactions came from ministers and professors of theology, the pressure on me mounted to the point where I decided I should quit the ministry.

Filled with doubts, I went to visit my father, who was a country preacher. "Don't be a fool," he told me. "I know that church-going people in small towns need you. Don't let the stuffed shirts in the big city drive you away from the church."

My father died a short time later. As we stood in front of his grave, my stepmother remarked, "Before he died, your father said: 'Tell Norman that he preaches true Christianity. Tell him to give no heed to those jackasses who are simply jealous of the fact that he sells some books. Tell him to get himself out of the picture and get Jesus Christ back into it. Tell him a Peale never quits!'"

But I was still ready to quit. His words had given me only a temporary lift; in my heart the doubts continued. I felt rejected, a discredit to my church, no longer fit to serve God. Unless I quit I would give a bad reputation to the ministry as a whole.

This was still my attitude a couple of weeks later. It was late on a Saturday night. I was still up but hadn't even prepared a sermon for the following morning. Instead, I was

thinking how I should go about resigning. In fact, I was actually drafting a letter of resignation! About 3 a.m. I received a call from a stranger. This seemed odd because I had an unlisted telephone number.

The man's voice was insistent. "I hate to call you at this time of night, but my wife would like you to come over here. I'm a doctor, but we need a spiritual doctor."

I thought to myself: it doesn't make much difference anyway because I'm all through, but aloud I said, "If I called you and said a member of my family was sick, I'm sure you would come to see him. I'll be right over."

I threw on my coat and didn't even bother to put on a tie, which is quite unlike me. When I arrived at the doctor's house, he said in a very unemotional way, "My little girl is going to die. I'm a medical man, and I know there's no hope. But my wife has a lingering belief in prayer, and this is pretty hard for her to take. So I agreed that you could come here to say a prayer."

I asked if he had any faith in prayer, and he said, "Not in circumstances like this."

I went upstairs to his little girl's room—she was about 9 or 10. I was very unsure of myself: I'm no wonder worker, no healer.

BUT THE DOCTOR'S WIFE believed I could heal the child. I told her we were just going to put the little girl in the hands of God and that she had to let the child go and not hang onto her, even in her own mind. "Actually the child doesn't belong to you at all. She belongs to God. You are only an agent into whose care she has been placed. Whatever God's will is for the child, accept it and try to realize that He can do no wrong."

The mother knelt down by the bed, and I knelt down with her. The husband sat off to one side. To my surprise, after a while I be-

came aware that he was kneeling by the bed, too. The three of us joined hands. I have always noticed that when people join hands in a crisis like this, they seem to create a circuit with God in the midst of them. I suddenly had a feeling of God's presence.

Hour after hour the woman stayed on her knees. I remained with her most of the time. After a while, the husband got up again and walked around restlessly. Finally it was morning. The mother went over to the window and opened the curtains, letting sunshine pour into the room. As she did this, the little girl stirred. Quick as a flash the father shot across the room to examine her.

"SOMETHING has happened," he exclaimed, tears streaming down his cheeks. "She has taken a turn for the better!" He was so elated that he hit me on the shoulder and punched me in the chest.

Then he looked at me in a curious way. "No matter what happened tonight, I still don't believe in your God," he said.

"But I believe in Him," I answered. Suddenly my faith had been restored.

Then I realized that it was morning and that I should be getting down to the church even though I had a stubbly beard and looked terrible. "Is there anything—anything at all I can do for you?" the father asked.

"Yes," I said. "You can lend me a necktie."

My heart was ready to overflow as I left that happy family and headed toward my church. I hadn't prepared a sermon, but under what better conditions could I preach than when my heart was so full of gratitude? I felt inspired, exalted.

That day I decided I had been foolish to let criticism get under my skin.

From then on, I banished all thought of giving up the ministry.



Hour after hour we prayed
for the little girl's
recovery. Her father sat
by her side—distraught
but unwilling to believe
in the power of prayer.

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