

PEACE THROUGH POSITIVITY
by Eugene Wehner, OCD

I begin with two stories. The first is one called "Attitude is Everything" by Francis Baltazar Schwartz.:

Jerry...was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply: "If I was any better, I would be twins!" He was a unique (restaurant) manager because he had several waiters who followed him around from restaurant to restaurant. The reason was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing his style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Jerry and asked him: "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?" Jerry replied: "Each morning I wake up and say to myself: 'Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood!' I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life." "Yeah, right, it's not that easy!" I protested. "Yes it is," Jerry said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how to react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: 'It's your choice how you live life.'" I reflected on what Jerry said. Soon thereafter I left the restaurant industry to start my own business. We lost touch but often I thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that Jerry did something you are never supposed to do in a restaurant business. He left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hands, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found relatively quickly and was rushed to the local trauma center. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullets still in his body.

I saw Jerry about six months after the (incident). When I

asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?" I declined to see his wounds, but I asked him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was that I should have locked the back door." Jerry replied. "Then, as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices. I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I (chose) to live." "Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. Jerry continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me that I was going to be fine, but when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read: 'He's a dead man.' I knew I needed to take action." "What did you do?" I asked. Well there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Jerry. "She asked me if I was allergic to anything? 'Yes,' I replied....'Bullets.' Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate me as if I am alive, not dead.'"

Jerry lived, thanks to the skills of his doctor, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything!

My second story is very short. A deeply distressed woman came to a minister and asked him to pray for her son who was absolutely no good. He had been in trouble with the law many times and she was afraid he would end up in a reform school or jail. After he finished listening to her sad story, he said: "No, I'm not going to pray for your son." She was shocked and admonished: "How could you refuse to pray for my son?" The minister answered: "Because every prayer I would raise up you would cancel by your negativity. Start thinking positively about your son's future and he will turn out fine." The woman took his words to heart, trusting that God would work a transformation in her son's life. Not only did her son never go to a reform school or jail, but also he became a minister himself.

I tell you these stories because I believe in the peace-producing power of a positive attitude toward life. We can be confident of a good outcome in every situation if we dispel negative thinking. Difficult people or situations will not steal our peace unless we choose to give them power over us.

How often have we let our troublesome circumstances get the best of us? Didn't Jesus Christ die for us so that we would never again have to be slaves to anyone or anything? Here are a few words from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we

suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.... We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8: 15-17, 28)

What enslaves us is our *not* trusting that God works good out of evil - even our own sinfulness. He does not want us to reproach ourselves for our imperfections but to approach him to accomplish his perfect will despite our faults and failings. Probably all of us, after we have done something that has displeased us, have asked ourselves in a disgusted tone, "What the hell am I doing?" The better question would be to ask God with hopeful expectation, "What, for heaven's sake, are *you* doing with me? The first question focuses on ourselves and has a sense of hopelessness about it. The second question focuses on God and asks for divine intervention and inner transformation. The first emphasizes our own imperfection in following our own plans while the second surrenders ourselves to One whose plan for us is perfect.

Everyone in this world suffers in some way or another, but Christians are able to endure pain in peace because they have the hope won for them through Christ's death and resurrection. Uniting our afflictions to his, we have hope not only for eternal life but also for a happy life here on earth. Believing this, we can have contentment even when events are not transpiring as we would like. But most people want a different kind of happiness. Doug Larson contends: "The world is full of people looking for spectacular happiness while they snub contentment." (May 19th entry in the 1991 edition of *Touchstones*) We are not content with contentment, but in difficult circumstances it may be the most happiness we could hope for. Ben Shapiro writes in *The Right Side of History*: "Pleasure is never enough. Lasting happiness can only be achieved through cultivation of soul and mind. And cultivating our souls and minds requires us to live with moral purpose.... Only living with moral purpose can grant profound happiness." (pages 5 and 8)

Joan Chittister defines happiness in her book *Happiness* as "a state of mind arising out of a sense of spiritual rightness and transcendent purpose in life." (page 172) She also gives this secret of happiness: "The secret really resides in our own ability to look on all things in life as possible gains rather than as probable threats.... Positivity declines to give in to the kind of groundless fear that resists or refuses the unknown because it is unknown.... Positivity makes all the other dimensions of happiness possible. It is the ground out of which happiness can finally spring." (pages 99 and 100)

Positivity flows directly from the Holy Spirit. If we can accept this, we can understand very well how St. Peter could state, "Happy are you when you are insulted for the sake of Christ, for then God's Spirit in its glory has come to rest on you." (1 Peter 4:14) Thus we can be enduring injustice, but with the help of the Holy Spirit we can still be happy. Joan Chittister also writes: "Happiness is what outlasts all the suffering in the world. It is the byproduct of learning to live well, to choose well, to become whole, and to be everything we are meant to be - for our sake and for the sake of the rest of the world, as well." (page 222)

If we are not happy, whose fault is it? Certainly not that of God, who has

given us the victory over all evil by sending us his only begotten Son out of love for us to suffer and die for us. In reality, there would be no unhappy Christians if we all fully accepted what Christ has done for us. He has made us daughters and sons of God, so why do we sometimes still think, speak, and act like slaves? Why are we still enslaved by our fears? Jesus consistently said to his disciples, "Be not afraid" and "Peace be with you" when they were paralyzed by fear. Clearly he does not want any of his disciples, including those of today, to be deterred by fear from being all that they could be or doing all that they could do for his kingdom.

Nevertheless most Christians are fearful. Even the early disciples, after the sending of the Holy Spirit, lacked the courage to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to every creature" (Mk. 16:15), as Jesus had commissioned them. It took someone with the fearlessness of St. Paul to carry out the missionary effort with determination. After his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus to imprison Christians, his baptism by Ananias, and catechesis of only a few days, "he began at once to proclaim Jesus" as "the Son of God." (Acts 9:20) He risked his life continuously for the sake of the spread of the Kingdom of God. There is a great difference between Paul and the wavering Peter or the doubting Thomas.

I suggest that it was the positive attitude of St. Paul that gave him his "peace that surpasses understanding" and his tremendous success at evangelization. He encountered many obstacles and sufferings, but nothing held him back. No matter how negative the situation, he focused on the positive.

I suspect that Paul had very positive parents and teachers. Possibly he did not have the negative influences that many of us have in our youth. But, regardless of his upbringing, somewhere in his development he decided that nothing would deter him from a goal he had set – whether learning the Jewish law, persecuting Christians, or spreading the Gospel.

We can all retrace our childhood development and righteously proclaim: "I'm fearful and self-critical because my parents or teachers were so critical, put so many limits on me, or didn't trust me." Our parents and teachers may have said the same things about their parents and teachers. But we have the capacity through God's grace to break the cycle of decline through the generations. Whatever negativity and criticalness we have learned can be unlearned. All that is required is that we have a firm resolve and courageously carry it out.

I chose my topic, not because I am like the courageous St. Paul but because I am like the doubting Thomas. I have been plagued with self-doubt and low sense of self-worth my whole life. I was a very submissive child in a strict home. Being most comfortable living in my interior world of ideas, I did not seek out friends. I was very shy and got my only sense of worth from excelling in academics. When I entered the seminary I had great difficulty adjusting to community life. Only as a diocesan priest in a rural parish far from other priests did I become aware of how much I needed other people for support. After a crisis situation, I decided to look at religious orders. The Lord led me to the Discalced Carmelites. In the midst of caring Carmelite communities and the transformative power of meditation, I have been drawn out of my interior world.

But, after serving as a missionary in Kenya for twenty years, an interior lack of peace became exteriorized. My anger concerning the poverty of the people and my frustration at not being able to help them enough became vocalized and frightened me and others.

I needed to reflect again upon my previous reading of a book entitled *You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought* by John-Roger and Peter McWilliams. It led me to reread *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale and another Peale work *The Positive Way to Change Your Life*. Pondering the suggestions in these books, I came to realize that eliminating negative thinking from our lives is a very sound principle, as such thinking is the source of negative words and actions. I also became aware of the tremendous value of focusing on the positive in every situation. My theological reflection led me to draw the conclusion that nothing happens to us unless allowed by God, who loves us totally and unconditionally. No matter how distressful the situation, God will bring some good out of it if we but surrender ourselves into the Lord's loving embrace. But, if we resist what God is doing through our undesirable experiences, we will miss excellent opportunities for growth.

I thought of St. John of the Cross imprisoned by his fellow Carmelites for nine months. What extreme resentment he could have harbored for that injustice. Yet, in a tiny, poorly lighted and ventilated cell, he was to experience mystical marriage and compose exquisite poetry. He made the best of a very bad situation. He continually had a positive focus. No matter how terrible our circumstances, we do not need to be taken under by them. We can rise above them and even grow through them.

How can we do this? First, by clear awareness of what we are doing to ourselves by our way of dealing with fearful situations. The unenlightened way of reacting to fear is the fight or flight response. It is to resist the perceived danger or to escape it. Much energy is used in the fighting or fleeing, but still the fearful one is not at peace. The enlightened way of dealing with a fearful situation is to embrace it as being allowed by God for our growth, while loving ourselves and others in the process. The enlightened person doesn't think: "God is sending this predicament as a punishment." This only gets a person caught up in guilt and self-anger. Nor does he or she direct anger at someone else, who is judged the enemy in the situation. Forgiveness and loving replaces guilt and resentment. As St. John of the Cross wrote in a letter to a nun lamenting his ill treatment by members of his Order: "Where there is no love put love and you will draw out love."

Love and acceptance of any situation are the opposite of the fight or flight response. They are the only way to total peace in a difficult situation. The McWilliams make these points very clearly in their book *You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought*. The authors state that through a lot of practice, one can develop these qualities. They give many tips on how to get rid of negative thinking. I used one of their tips by wearing a rubber band around my wrist. If I discovered myself thinking negatively, I pulled the band and snapped my wrist. It was a reminder that what I've done to myself by chastising myself or being critical of another or offering resistance to an unpleasant situation was

more harmful to myself than the slight pain I caused myself by snapping the rubber band. Slowly I conditioned myself to do less negative thinking. However, a Christian does not do something like this unless she or he is convinced through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures that focusing on the positive is the best way of living. The McWilliams' book was not much help in either of these areas, so I turned to the Scriptures and the classic *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale.

I was fascinated that in Psalm 119, the author prays: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted.... In your faithfulness you have afflicted me." In other words, whatever sufferings God allows us to have are part of divine fidelity. God is drawing us through our uncomfortable experiences to new life. So we do not need to be distressed by them. If we had perfect wings of interior peace, our feathers would never get ruffled. But we will not have those wings until we fly to heaven. In the meantime, we need to preen our feathers with positivity. If we do so, we will fly right even when we have "hell" on earth.

Norman Vincent Peale, in *The Power of Positive Thinking*, recommends a number of other significant Scripture verses that we can use when we are discouraged or counseling others in resisting negative thinking:

1. Phil. 4:13 – "I have strength for everything through him who empowers me."
2. Lk. 1:37 – "Nothing is impossible for God."
3. Ps. 27:1 – "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear."

If we are fearful, Peale recommends that we envision ourselves as being triumphant in the situation. Regarding our future, he urges us to decide what we want to accomplish, set a date for its achievement, and pray fervently and work diligently with full confidence that it will come to pass. He quotes Mk. 11:24: "All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours." He gives many examples of people doing this successfully. One of the most interesting accounts he gives is of a meeting called because a magazine he helped inaugurate – *Guideposts* – was in dire danger of being discontinued. Everyone at the meeting was extremely pessimistic except one woman. Listen to Peale's account of how she spoke to that gathering:

I am going to give you an idea...a creative idea....What is your present trouble? It is that you *lack* everything. You *lack* money. You *lack* subscribers. You *lack* equipment. You *lack* ideas. You *lack* courage. Why do you *lack* all these requirements? Simply because you are thinking *lack*. If you think *lack* you create the conditions that produce a state of *lack*. By this constant mental emphasis upon what you *lack* you have frustrated the creative forces that can give impetus to the development of *Guideposts*. You have been working hard from the standpoint of doing many things, but you have failed to do the one all-important thing that will lend power to all your other efforts: you have not employed positive thinking. Instead, you

have thought in terms of *lack*.

To correct the situation – reverse the mental process and begin to think prosperity, achievement, success. This will require practice, but it can be done quickly if you will demonstrate faith. The process is to visualize; that is, to see *Guideposts* in terms of successful achievement. Create a mental picture of *Guideposts* as a great magazine, sweeping the country. Visualize large numbers of subscribers, all eagerly reading this inspirational material and profiting thereby. Create a mental image of lives being changed by the philosophy of achievement which *Guideposts* teaches monthly in its issues. (*The Power of Positive Thinking*, pages 227-228)

She then encouraged the group to visualize the increase of their subscribers from their present 40,000 to 100,000. She then led them in praying in thanksgiving to God for giving them 100,000 subscribers. She was practicing a way that is advised by Pema Chodron in her book *When Things Fall Apart*. "Move towards difficulties rather than backing away." (page 122)

After this meeting, Norman Vincent Peale reports:

From that moment until the present writing *Guideposts* never lacked for anything. It has found wonderful friends and has had fine support. It has been able always to meet its bills, purchase needed equipment, finance itself, and as I write these words *Guideposts* is nearing the half-million mark and more subscriptions are coming in regularly, sometimes as many as three or four thousand per day. (*Ibid.*, page 229)

I share this incident mainly because it is one of the few mentioned in the book in which the positive thinkers receive more than that which was requested. But in most undesirable circumstances, people are so tense that they need some helps to calm down before they can do any positive visualization. Peale suggests that when panicky we remember or imagine a peaceful scene that will have a calming effect on our bodies or look over photos of ourselves in a happier state of affairs. When angry he recommends that we sit or lie still and image the parts of our body relaxing. If we are shouting, we can deliberately reduce our voice to a whisper or use praise words. I suggest the words: "Praise the Lord anyhow!" This is in perfect accord with Psalm 34:2: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." Peale advises that, before we end up out of control, instead of counting to ten we can substitute the first ten words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name."

He advises that his readers put these visualization techniques into practice each day and recommends: "Start each day by affirming peaceful, contented, and happy attitudes and your days will tend to be pleasant and successful." (*Ibid.* page 30) He quotes the modern philosopher William James:

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” A modern motivational teacher Napoleon Hill has said, “What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”

Lynne McTaggart, in her book *The Intention Experiment*, writes, concerning the success of scientific experiments in which visualization techniques are used:

Patients have boosted treatment of an array of acute and chronic conditions, from coronary artery disease and high blood pressure to low back pain and musculoskeletal diseases, including fibromyalgia, by using mental pictures or metaphoric representations of their bodies fighting the illness. Visualization has also improved post-surgical outcomes, helped with pain management, and minimized the side effects of chemotherapy.... Somebody else’s good intentions for you may be as powerful as your own.... Scientific evidence also reveals that we can affect virtually any other living thing as well. The enormous body of evidence on healing gathered by the Dr. Daniel Benor shows that thoughts can have powerful effects on a variety of plants, seeds, single-celled organisms such as bacteria and yeast, and insects and other small animals.... Repeatedly, the mind has proved to be a far more powerful healer than the greatest breakthrough drugs.... One well-directed thought may be a gentle but effective way for men and women to on the street to take matters of global interest into their own hands. (pages 135, 143 and 195)

As you see from what I’ve been teaching today, I agree with the importance of the “mind over matter” principle. At the same time, I see one drawback in visualization. Our vision is always very limited. It is good for us to set a definite goal and a time to achieve it, but I believe (as Scripture says) that we can expect more from God than what we can ask or imagine.

So it is that St. Teresa of Avila writes in her *Interior Castle*, 3, 2, 9: “The Lord...always gives much more than we deserve by giving us consolations far greater than those we find in the comforts and distractions of life.” Joel Giallanza, CSC, in his excellent article “Believe That God Can Do Far More,” writes that Teresa challenges us to continue making every effort to do what we can without becoming so restrictive that we allow no room for God to “have a free hand.” (*Spiritual Life*, summer 2001, page 84)

An example of someone in Scripture who allowed God to do more for him than he expected is the “man lame from birth” who begged for alms from Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. The two disciples had no money but offered to heal him in the name of Jesus. Upon his healing, he was able to enter the Temple “walking and leaping and praising God.” (Acts 3:8)

When we engage either in negative or limiting thinking, we place an obstacle in the way of our receiving what God is ready to give us. St. Teresa of

Avila asks of God in her book *Foundations 2*, 7: “Who is more fond than You of giving, or of serving even at a cost to Yourself, when there is someone open to receive?” Again she prays in her *Meditations on the Song of Songs* 5:6: “How miserable we would remain if Your giving were in conformity with our asking!” In the same book she writes: “(God) would never want to do anything else than give if He could find receivers....The Lord is never content with giving as little as we desire.” (6, 1)

Why do we desire so much less than God desires to give us? The reason is not only that we are unwilling to be surprised or “to have our expectations overturned,” as Giallanza suggests (*Spiritual Life*, summer 2001, page 88), but also that we are often feeling unworthy of receiving anything better than that which we are presently experiencing. John-Roger and Peter McWilliams call unworthiness the “wellspring of negative thinking....a deep-seated belief that ‘I’m just not good enough.’” (*You Can’t Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought*, page 63) I believe that this conviction is the greatest deception of Satan, the Father of lies. The truth is that, as we pray in Psalm 8:6: “You (Lord) have made (humans) little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor.” St. John of the Cross goes a step further by asserting that we are “gods by participation” in God’s grace. If we were worthy of God’s only begotten Son dying for us on the cross for our salvation, who are we to say that we are unworthy of receiving any gift God might wish to offer us? Such is the height of false humility.

What should be our attitude toward the utter graciousness of God? St. Teresa answers in her *Interior Castle* 6, 9, 16: “The safest way is to want only what God wants. He knows more than we ourselves do, and He loves us. Let us place ourselves in His hands so that His will may be done in us, and we cannot err if, with a determined will, we always maintain this attitude.” Furthermore, when we have received favors from God, we are (according to Teresa) “obliged to serve more since (we) have received more....Thus, the soul doesn’t think about receiving more but about how to serve for what it has received.” (*Interior Castle* 6, 9, 16) In other words, “What you have received, give as a gift.”

Above all his gifts, God wants to give us himself to live within us. Thus Teresa writes in her *Spiritual Testimonies*, 3, 10: “Neither live, nor speak, nor have any desire but that God who strengthens and governs me might live in me.” Giallanza maintains: “This sole desire provides the surety that God’s ways and works will be accomplished within us, without detrimental interference from our expectations....We are created for whatever God wants to work within us for we are created in God’s own image.” (*Spiritual Life*, summer 2001, pages 89 and 91) Like Norman Vincent Peale, Giallanza quotes our fearless hero, St. Paul: “No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor can the human mind even conceive all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” (I Cor. 2:9)

Once we have this conviction and attain a deep serene confidence in God, how can we continue to remain in a calm state of mind and heart and at peace with God, ourselves and others? Even though we are peaceful, we have to daily deal with people at work, in religious community, or in family that are critical and anger-prone. Our calm demeanor will not change them. But what we can do, when they indulge in critical conversation or hateful talk about somebody is to

bring up some good quality of the person. Pema Chodron writes: "Cultivating nonaggression is cultivating peace. The way to stop the war is to stop hating the enemy." (page 109)

Similarly, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has said: "If you speak a different language, you will see a different world." Maybe by our being less critical, others will see a different world than the way they are presently seeing it. But if, in our conversation with others, they refuse to speak positively about another, we can always say that we have something important to do and excuse ourselves from the gossip session. That is not a lie, because the important thing to do in that situation is to get away from the negative conversation. As Charles Swindoll, admits in his book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*:

The more I'm around people who talk about how things won't work, and how this isn't good, and how even though there were ten very fine things, two things went wrong, the more I begin to think, "You know, a lot of things are wrong." Then I get petty and negative in other areas. (page 264)

We need to be careful about our associations with people with negative attitudes, or gradually our attitude will become more negative. Hear the wisdom of Proverbs 22:24-25:

Do not associate with a man given to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Lest you learn his ways,
And find a snare for yourself.

Instead let's try to cultivate friendship with positive people like Jerry in my opening story. Our attitude will then tend to remain positive and in turn we will inspire others by our positive presence.

In fact, you might (for your retention of a positive spirit) have a support group of friends who are struggling against negativity. If you have a deep-seated inferiority complex or habitual problem with anger, you may require a professional counselor. If you are in an environment that is unhealthy for you and no amount of love and acceptance on your part is allowing you peace, maybe you need to escape the situation. Flight is better than slowly dying. The fight or flight response is not the ideal one, but if the choice becomes narrowed to fighting or fleeing (because others are not embracing the circumstances as you are attempting to do), flight is the more peaceful alternative. If you are in an unhealthy relationship, don't think you are being cowardly if, as a last resort, it seems wise to remove yourself completely from the situation. Your physical, emotional and spiritual health is more important than keeping up appearances that all is well. You are of enormous worth in God's eyes and, as the all-loving and all-merciful one, the Lord would not want you to be enslaved in an extremely unhealthy and unworkable situation. Even St. John of the Cross escaped his imprisonment. It was a better alternative than dying.

However, most often, we cannot totally escape our negative situations. We don't have to. All we may need to do is to take a more appreciative and less depreciative stance towards all of life. In their book *The Power of Appreciation*, Adrian van Kaam and Susan Muto write:

Appreciation is the single most important disposition to be cultivated in our life and world today. The power of appreciation helps us to look at the directions for living offered by everyday events, good, bad and indifferent, in a new way.... Once you escape the trap of depreciative thinking, you learn to appreciate yourself as an effective, free participant in a world that challenges your creativity, appeals to your courage, and invites the continual exercise of your competence. You enjoy a new lease on life.... Appreciative thinking enables you to see the crises that emerge in your everyday life not as obstacles leading to defeat but as opportunities offering new directions by which to reshape your dreams.... Depreciative flashbacks tempt you to give in to the downside. Renounce them immediately. Replace them with what we call "appreciative imaginative prospects." (pages 19, 29, 42)

This attitude paves the way for what van Kaam and Muto call "transcendent transformation" rather than entrapment in "obsessive happiness directives" that are illusory. They assert:

Our lower illusions of fulfillment evoke attachments to the idols of social security, vital pleasure, and functional satisfaction as if these were ultimate. The illusion that the human longing for peace, wholeness, and happiness will be satisfied if only these demands can be met tightens its grip.... The lower, or pretranscendent, dimensions of your life ought to be the servants, not the masters, of your highest, or transcendent dimension.... To the degree that our existence is in tune with our God-given essence, our life call, and the transcendent tradition to which we are committed, we will be able to live as distinctively human or spiritual persons." (*The Power of Appreciation*, page 47)

Somebody, I don't recall who, said something like this: "We are spiritual beings with a human nature not just human beings with a spiritual nature." We will get through life very well if we keep our eyes on God rather than what the world can offer us. Our pride causes us to become upset when our plans for worldly success are defeated. But, if we have confidence that even our failures are being used by God for our ultimate reward of heaven, nothing will disturb us. Is this not what St. Teresa of Jesus was telling us in these memorable words?

Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing make you afraid.
All things are passing.
God alone never changes.
Patience gains all things.
If you have God, you will want for nothing.
God alone suffices.

A positive, non-judgmental, and appreciative attitude will take us from gloom and doom to inner joy and peace. Again hear the words of van Kaam and Muto: "No matter how bad things seem to be, we can take an appreciative stance toward them. We can live in hope-filled abandonment to the mystery. The peace of appreciation lifts us beyond what hassles us emotionally.... To be faithful, it is necessary to resist the pull of a depreciative society." (*The Power of Appreciation*, pages 72 and 73)

The call here is to have a counter-cultural attitude that does not condone our society's lack of appreciation, criticalness, and negativity. It is a call to not be controlled by our emotions but to accept whatever God allows life to give us, even suffering. St. Francis de Sales counseled in a Christmas Eve sermon: "Live in profound humility and complete resignation, ready to accept with equanimity of spirit both desolations and consolations, sweetness and tribulations, dryness and repugnances." (*The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Advent and Christmas*, page 79) God does not allow us to lack anything that we need for our growth.

Finally I wish to close with the most positive psalm in the Bible: Psalm 23. Let it speak to your heart:

The Lord is my shepherd;
There is nothing I lack.
In green pastures you let me graze;
To safe waters you lead me;
You restore my strength.
You guide me along the right path
For the sake of your name.
Even when I walk through a dark valley,
I fear no harm for you are at my side;
Your rod and staff give me courage.
You set a table for me
As my enemies watch;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Only goodness and love will pursue me
All the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of the Lord
For years to come.