

OPTIMISM IS GOOD FOR YOU
2 Corinthians 1:18:22

July 4th Weekend
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Several years ago a study was released by the Mayo Clinic which showed that optimists on average live considerably longer than pessimists. In their study of 839 patients going back to 1962 they found that the most pessimistic among (this group) tended to die earlier than the most optimistic, regardless of age or gender.

This study also affirmed that this is “yet another layer in the growing body of research showing that optimism leads to success at work, school, sports, health and longevity.” And according to one of the authors, this study and others like it more importantly “show that the mind can influence the body in important ways.”

Other research the article references “has shown similar links between attitude and health. Pessimistic people have been shown to have weaker immune systems, are prone to colds and flu and have more major health problems after the age of 50.” In other words according to Charles Carver, a psychologist at the University of Miami, “optimism is good for you.”

And that is why I firmly believe that people of faith living in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ also live healthier and longer lives. For the truth of Jesus is centered in hope and optimism. Jesus said in John 10:10, “*I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly.*” In Jesus we are confident and filled with joy.

This is why the Apostle Paul also proclaims in 2 Corinthians 2 that our God, through his Son Jesus, always affirms “Yes” through his promises. In other words our God totally affirms his world and creation; he believes in us—in you and me—and the great things he can do through us and through his church.

Paul says that it is God who has established us, has anointed us and who puts the seal of his Spirit on our hearts. And because God claims us by his grace Paul says that “*every one of God’s promises is a yes.*” He wants only what is best for us; he wants our lives and talents to blossom; he fills us with optimism and hope where we can shout “*amen to the glory of God.*”

And yet we know that life today is often filled with negative and bad news. There are often roadblocks that get in our way and it is easy to get down and depressed. It is so tempting to allow all the bad news in this world to get us thinking negative thoughts or to make us into a pessimistic person.

So how can we help ourselves to be optimistic people? What are some helpful steps that can help us to affirm God’s “yes” in our lives? A number of years ago I had the privilege to participate in a three year, nine week-long leadership modules as part of the *Beeson Institute For*

Advanced Church Leadership (Asbury Seminary). One of these week-long learning modules was held at an amazing church in Houston, TX and the focus was on “**Visionary Leadership.**”

Dr. Dale Galoway, who was the dean of this institute, shared an article that week that he had written which looks at 12 ways to get rid of that negativity in us, and rather activate the positive and good things in you, and me. In fact, Dr. Galoway says that “nothing proves more important in life and ministry than having a good, positive mental attitude.”

Dale Galoway’s first suggestion is that we, “***Become an ambassador of good words to every person we meet everyday.***” Jesus taught in Matthew 7 that if we give, we will receive. To fill our lives with joy, give cheerful words to everyone we meet.

The second suggestion is, “***No matter what happens, look for the good and you’ll find it.***” A positive person recognizes the negative but refuses to dwell on it. Positive thinking people habitually look for the best results from the worst conditions. More often than naught, when you look for the good you will find it.

The third suggestion is, “***By an act of will, fill your mind with what is positive.***” This idea comes straight from the Bible. Philippians 4:8 says, “*Finally whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about these things.*”

The Apostle Paul himself experienced great failure in the town of Philippi. Instead of being followed by people eager to learn Paul and his coworkers were seized, beaten and thrown into a terrible jail. But they didn’t spend their time whining or looking on the dark side. They sang and gave thanks to God; their positive attitude did not depend on outward circumstances.

The fourth suggestion is, “***Never surrender to negative emotions.***” Dale Galoway says that the way we handle the mighty onrush of negative emotions is to admit them and face them, but don’t give in to them. A sure way to fight weeds is to plant thick healthy plants. We can destroy an invading negative emotion by using an affirmation to drown it out.

The fifth suggestion is, “***Practice the principal of replacement.***” What he stresses here is that we can find a positive counterpart to replace every negative emotion. For example, we can replace anger with love; fear with faith; despair with hope; greed with generosity; sorrow with joy; complaint with gratitude; worry with trust; and guilt with forgiveness.

The sixth suggestion is, “***Bar the suggestive, lewd, perverted, immoral and vulgar from your mind.***” The reality is that we can’t feed on garbage and stay healthy in mind. The Bible says in Romans 12:2, “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*”

The old saying is true, “Garbage in, garbage out.” And yet isn’t it better to think, “Good in, good out?” If we put good thoughts in our minds; if we are careful what information we are listening to—what movies/TV we are watching; what e-mails and websites we are drawn to; the people we

are listening to and are spending time with. If we put good thoughts into our minds, good actions will come out. You and I are responsible for the feeding of our minds.

The seventh suggestion is, ***“See good in others.”*** Jesus looked at the prostitute and saw a beautiful child of God. He looked at a tax collector and saw an honest person. Jesus always saw possibilities in people others didn’t see. Look for the good in everyone we meet.

The eighth suggestion is, ***“Determine to take an attitude of love and goodness toward others.”*** Love people and they will love us back. Change our attitude toward difficult people and they may change their attitude toward us. A good attitude will win us friends and influence people.

The ninth suggestion is, ***“Express appreciation and warm feelings to others.”*** Dr. Galoway says that 99% of the time, when bad thoughts crowd good thoughts out of our mind, it is because they are selfish thoughts. A common need for most of us is to get our minds off ourselves.

The solution?...give ourselves away. We do this by expressing gratitude and words of appreciation, or by showing love for another person. Giving yourself in friendship and service to other people applies one of the most healing therapies in the world.

The tenth suggestion is, ***“Practice positive prayer.”*** Nothing clears our minds like prayer. We’ve all heard stories of how people have been in major confusion due to trying circumstances. And yet when they really got alone with God and poured out their concerns, a peace settled over them and they were able to think clearly.

As you pray fill your minds with these verses: Romans 8:31, *“If God is for us, who can be against us.”* Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

The eleventh suggestion is, ***“Count on the fact that God is good and has a plan for your life.”*** God will not fail you. God will not let you down. He will bring good out of bad. If you’re feeling down get an exciting idea and put it into action. It is so much fun to live expectantly.

The twelfth and final suggestion, ***“Expect God’s best and you will receive it.”*** We need to voice these affirmations often: God is stronger than the strongest; God forgives me; God is with me; nothing is impossible with God.

Are you, my friend, an optimistic or pessimistic person? Dale Galoway reminds us that old habits do not die easily. We can only climb a ladder one rung at a time. And we can only become a positive person one choice at a time.

Please remember my friends that our God says “yes” to you and me through his promises. May we in turn say “amen” through putting into practice these positive and helpful suggestions. And as people of hope, faith and optimism may we live long, healthy and hope-filled lives.