

Four Secrets Of Optimistic People

There are countless problems in our lives right now — sin, bad economy, family problem, health issues, and accidents. People deal with troubling circumstances every day. People typically react with a negative attitude to these issues — I know I do. Too often though, people take this negative attitude and make it part of their personality. Another term for this is pessimism. With all the negatives in this life, one can easily fall into the pessimism trap. How can we turn our frowns upside down? Optimism is a learned behavior, so let's look at four secrets of optimistic people and how Paul wrote of them in his letters.

First, they express gratitude. Optimistic people rarely talk about what they don't have; it's almost always about what they do have. You may not live in your dream house yet, but you can be thankful that you're not homeless. You may not drive a BMW, but at least you don't have to ride the bus to work. And even if you do take the bus, at least you don't have to walk. Do you see the point? Life will never be perfect. It's all about how you look at it. Most people have it worse than we do. If we want to be optimistic, we need to be thankful for the good we already have, not what we are lacking. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Second, they help others. Optimistic people aren't focused on themselves. This doesn't necessarily mean we go volunteer at a homeless shelter (but you could). This is about shifting the focus from ourselves to others. Just give it a try. Go help an elderly person with some housework. Go visit someone who has been sick or is in the hospital. Go help around the house with chores you normally skip. Studies have shown that people are much more happy and satisfied when they are focusing on helping others and not on their own problems. Philippians 2:4 says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:24; 13:5).

Third, they notice the good. Optimistic people always seem to look on the bright side. They are able to find that silver lining. This isn't something that comes naturally. This is one part of optimism that we have to practice. It is very difficult to look for something positive when you are faced with dreadful situations like death, poverty, and sickness. Paul wrote, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). While it may not appear right away, an optimistic person keeps looking for the positives.

Fourth, they change negative self-talk. Optimistic people think positively about themselves. Typically, when people look in the mirror they begin to pick out all of their flaws, wish they were different, and insult themselves for not being better. Much of this is stimulated by our culture's standard for beauty, which is unbelievably distorted. Through the magic of programs like Photoshop, people are made to look like what they aren't in real life. So, what is the point? Don't be so hard on yourself. No one is flawless. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me

was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Focus on the good and change the negative self-talk into positive thoughts about yourself.

Numbers 14:1-10 has significant examples of optimism and pessimism. After the twelve spies had returned from spying out the land of Canaan, ten of the spies said that the enemy was too big and strong and they couldn't conquer the land. But Joshua and Caleb were optimistic and told them that God would give them the land. Unfortunately, the crowd listened to the ten pessimistic spies and God sent them back into the wilderness. For these people, pessimism was the difference between entering Canaan and going back out to die in the wilderness. Hebrews 3:19 says, “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Pessimism drove their unbelief! It's dangerous and no one needs this lesson driven deep within his heart more than me!

Life is so much better when we focus on the positive side. Consider this: we know that God helps us (Matthew 6:25-34), we know that God protects us (2 Corinthians 1:10), and we know that God wants good for all His children (Isaiah 63:7). God provides these blessings because He wants us to be joyful. He wants us to praise Him for these blessings. There are way too many positives in this life to wallow around in all the negatives, so think about some positives in your life right now and practice being an optimistic person.

Adapted from Brett Petrillo