

Optimism as a Lifestyle

Seeing the Glass
"Half-Full"

A Few Quotes

"Success is measured by your ability to maintain enthusiasm between failures."

- Sir Winston Churchill

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

- Sir Winston Churchill

"Don't ever become a pessimist; a pessimist is correct oftener than an optimist, but an optimist has more fun - and neither can stop the march of events."

- Robert A. Heinlein

Definition of Optimism vs. Pessimism

Optimism:

"An inclination to put the most favorable construction upon actions and events or to anticipate the best possible outcome"

Pessimism:

"An inclination to emphasize adverse aspects, conditions, and possibilities, or to expect the worst possible outcome."

Optimism vs. Pessimism

Common Perceptions:

| <u>Optimism</u> | <u>Pessimism</u> |
|---|---|
| Seeing the glass "half-full" | Seeing the glass "half-empty" |
| Overall belief that things will always work out in the end | Overall belief that things are doomed to fail |
| Says: "I can do something to make this situation better." (focus on what you can do) | Says: "Probably nothing I do will make any difference" (focus on what you can't control) |
| Generally Positive | Generally Negative |

Characteristics of an Optimist

More than just seeing through "rose-colored glasses?"

An Optimist:

- ▶ Finds the opportunity in a difficult or challenging situation
- ▶ Looks for partial solutions, even in the midst of conflict
- ▶ Uses their imagination to rehearse success when facing a new challenge— can see themselves succeeding
- ▶ Focuses on the aspects of a stressful situation which they have some measure of influence, then takes corresponding action
- ▶ Optimists are successful people!

Optimism: a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Optimists benefit from:

- ▶ Better brains
 - In a 10-year long research project, individuals with an optimistic world view saw an increase in their IQ by at least 10 points.
- ▶ Healthier Bodies
 - Studies have found that Optimists are more resistant to infectious illness and are better at fending off chronic diseases in middle age.
- ▶ Healthier Relationships
- ▶ Greater Success in Leadership and Business
 - "Every exemplary leader I have met has what seems to be an unwarranted degree of optimism— and that helps generate the energy and commitment to achieve results." ~ Warren Bennis, *The Leadership Advantage*
- ▶ Other benefits include less stress, better emotional health, longer life, and greater ability to bounce back from setbacks

What makes the difference?

The most significant difference between optimists and pessimists is based on:

1. How a person interprets life events
2. How one responds to life events based on that interpretation

Seligman's Explanatory Style

Seligman's Theory Says:

- ▶ Optimism does not equal positive thinking
- ▶ Optimism has to do with how you interpret life events, both good and bad
- ▶ The way you interpret these events – both positive and negative – is described by Seligman as our Explanatory Style
- ▶ Three primary elements:
 - Permanence
 - Pervasiveness
 - Personalization
- ▶ Your current tendencies in these three elements dictate your optimism level

What is Your Explanatory Style?

Rate Yourself

Seligman's Explanatory Style The Three P's

1. *Permanence*: Is it likely to continue? Is it permanent or temporary?
2. *Pervasiveness*: Is it reflective of your whole life? Is it "specific" or is it "universal"?
3. *Personalization*: Internal vs. External

Explanatory Style

- ▶ Pessimists see failure as permanent, personal and pervasive
- ▶ Optimists see it as temporary, non-personal, and specific.
- ▶ Their views on success are the opposite.

Optimism from a Biblical Worldview

Optimism is an attitude of the heart that we can cultivate. This optimistic attitude is cultivated through authentic faith.

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

Biblical Examples of Optimism

- ▶ David, the Shepherd Boy
 - The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine..." (1 Sam 17:37)
 - ▶ Remembered God's faithfulness in the past
 - ▶ Did not focus on his inabilities or weakness, nor did he make excuses
 - ▶ Saw the possibility (envisioned it) and was confident of victory!

Biblical Examples of Optimism

- ▶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 - "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."
 - ▶ Did not interpret the threat of the furnace as doom or resign themselves to such an end
 - ▶ Saw God accurately (as their redeemer)
 - ▶ Spoke out what they believed, even if they could not see it in their situation yet.
 - ▶ Faced their fear with confidence

Hindrances to Optimism

- ▶ Wrong Beliefs
 - About God, Others or Ourselves
 - Often shaped by a major tragedy, loss, failure or disappointment
- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Learned behavior/patterns from family of origin
- ▶ The desire to control events/situations
- ▶ Fear of failure/Fear of Rejection
- ▶ Lack of submission to God's Authority
 - Have not realized our personal disparity apart from Christ
 - Trying to live outside of God's order leads to frustration and inability to walk in peace

Changing your Perspective

Making things CLEAR

Control: What about the situation can you control (i.e. what CAN you do vs. what is out of your control)?

Lies: What lies are you buying into about the situation?

- Pervasiveness, Permanence, Personalization

Expectation: Is your expected outcome realistic (in light of God's truth)?

Authority: What in the situation have you not given to God's authority?

Remember: God's Promises regarding your life and your situation (What do you know?)

Living an Optimistic Lifestyle

- ▶ **Ensure your life is in Submission to Christ** - outside of his authority, you will never find true satisfaction and peace.
- ▶ **Learn to interpret each situation you face in the light of God's truth** -
 - Find scripture that speaks to your specific situation and meditate on it!
 - Listen to what you tell yourself about each situation and deal with false beliefs according to God's word
 - Begin to look at how you interpret successes and failures in your life and challenge wrong thinking.
- ▶ **Surround yourself with positive influence** - Guard against the professional complainer/naysayer and find friends that will encourage your success.

Living an Optimistic Lifestyle

- ▶ **Celebrate and focus on your strengths** - focus on what you do well and capitalize on it, esp. in the midst of challenge.
- ▶ **Do not dwell on what you cannot change** - identify what you can change and proactively find ways to do something about it!
- ▶ **Set an expectation of success for yourself and others** - envision yourself meeting or exceeding the goals you have set and find ways to encourage others in their pursuits!
- ▶ **Break out of your routine from time to time** - spontaneity works your optimistic muscles...don't forget to have some fun!
- ▶ **Get in the habit of recognizing the positive (gratitude)** - take time to inventory your blessings on a regular basis. It will help you keep perspective!
- ▶ **Smile More** - it will make a difference!

Final Thoughts

"Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."-Philippians 4:8

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." – Romans 15:13

Scriptural Basis for Optimism

(Seeing through a Biblical worldview):

Optimism is an attitude of the heart that we can cultivate. This optimistic attitude is cultivated through authentic faith.

The Big Picture: Gaining Perspective

Meditate on these truths:

1. We are offered forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life in heaven! (Acts 10:43, John 10:27-29)

2. We have access to a personal and individual relationship with God as our Father and Friend. (John 1: 11-13, 2 Corinthians 6:18)

3. God has a distinctive, personal, and achievable plan for each of our lives, with our best interests and his highest intentions in mind. (Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 37:4)

4. In Christ, we have:
 - a. Protection/Deliverance from Evil (Proverbs 12:21, Psalm 91:9-11)
 - b. Victory in Life (and in Death!) (Proverbs 16:3, Luke 10:19, I Corinthians 15:54-56)
 - c. Provision for all of our Needs (2 Peter 1:3-4, Philippians 4:19)
 - d. A place to leave all of our burdens (I Peter 5:7)
 - e. Constant Companionship (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5)
 - f. The ability and power to change, to become more godly (2 Peter 1:4)
 - g. Freedom from all bondage and fear (2 Timothy 1:7, Galatians 5:1)

5. View of God: A God who is intimately involved in our affairs and who acts in love for us, even in those circumstances that we neither understand nor control.

I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Psalm 121:1-5

How do you rate yourself on your explanatory style?

Seligman's Explanatory Style is the way that you explain events to yourself - both good and bad. You explain to yourself that what has happened is permanent or temporary, pervasive and global, or specific (limited to just this one event), or personal (you're responsible) or external (somebody else gets the credit or blame.)

This is a general measure of your optimistic or pessimistic attitude based on Seligman's theory of optimism.

1. Consider a specific event in your life when something exceptionally good has occurred.

When something good happens to me, I tell myself that:

A.

1. This kind of thing always happens.
2. These things happen sometimes.
3. This never happens.

B.

1. This event happened because of something I've done.
2. This happened because of me but I was lucky: in the right place at the right time.
3. This is really due to someone or something else.

C.

1. This is a great example of the way things always go for me.
2. This event is great, but it's just limited to this one specific situation.
3. This event is a quirk, it'll never happen again.

2. Consider a specific event in your life when you have experienced a disappointment or failure.

When something bad happens to me, I tell myself that:

A.

1. Wow, how unusual! This never happens.
2. This may just be a quirk; this normally doesn't happen.
3. Here we go again. This is typical of what always happens.

B.

1. It's not me - it's them.
2. Maybe I could have done better, but so should they.
3. I should have done better - it's my fault.

C.

1. Well, this is only limited to this one situation.
2. This is too bad, and it could easily happen again.
3. This is awful. It will ruin everything.

Score: _____

Optimism as a Lifestyle

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