

How to be Positive in our Increasingly Negative World

Discussion Group Format

By Wayne Vasilenko

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Part 1... Why all the Negativity?

There are so many negatives we have to deal with on a daily basis it can be overwhelming at times. Just listen to the daily news... there is not much positive there. Then there are the trials of everyday life. Although I too have had frustrations, problems, and worries throughout my life; with the help of God's Word, I began to see them from a new perspective. We all can look at the things happening around us many different ways, for example, from a "Secular Worldview" it may seem that things are falling apart in our present world, while from a "Biblical Worldview" everything actually seems to be coming together! Which of these viewpoints you use as your baseline, has a lot to do with how we as human beings react to the things going on around us. One viewpoint tends to breed frustration and depression, while the other peace, joy, and a stronger faith in God and His Word! If you consider yourself a Christian, a good question to ask yourself when life seems overwhelmingly depressing is this..."What can possibly happen in your life that is too big for God to handle?" The answer might seem obvious to many, but I have come to the realization that in the past, I have gone through a good part of my life, even after becoming a Christian, feeling as if there were things I would have to deal with on my own. For example, there were times that I felt my problems were too "**Petty**" to bother God with. I could not imagine God being interested in the trivial things I was dealing with, after all, He had a universe to run. He couldn't possibly have time to be bothered with how I am going to pay my electric bill or the mortgage, could He? In contrast, were other times I have felt that I had too many problems or concerns, and I felt as if it was too much to ask of God, I felt that I might overwhelm Him, that somehow I would cause the lights in heaven to dim if I unloaded all my problems on God!

The Role of False Teachings

A lot of the confusion concerning these feelings is the result of false doctrines or false teachings in the church. Have you ever noticed that every time there is a disaster, or when things seem to be falling apart, it is often times said to be, an act of God or some kind of "punishment" from God? How many times have people told you that the reason negative things are happening in your life is because God is trying to show you something, or that He is punishing you for some sin you committed, and He will keep punishing you until you "Get it under the Blood." Years ago, even I used to tell people, "Sometimes God knocks you flat on your back to get you to look up!" However, over time, through the study of God's Word, I came to realize that God does not really work that way, He is not the one putting the negatives in our lives or knocking us flat on our backs! Yes, I do know the story of Job, but that is an entirely different story serving an entirely different purpose. Nevertheless, many people are taught that God micro-manages all aspects of our lives, but this is simply not true!

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We sing songs like "God is in Control" that convey the message that there is nothing we can do about things that happen in our lives; it implies that God is up in heaven directing every little thing that happens. Being taught that it does not matter what we do, that our destiny is all planned out, we are often directed to passages in the Bible that talk about God having a plan for each and every one of us. As a result, over time, we begin to believe that we really do not have anything to do with what happens in our lives, and in our world, after all... God is in control. Actually, God does have a plan for us! However, the whole truth is, the passages pertaining to God's plan for us, ***do not say that we have to follow God's plan!*** Could it really be that it is a choice we have to make on our own; or does God in fact force us to follow His plan for us or else shun, or punish us until we do?

What does the Word say?

Let us try to figure that out once, and for all. Here is what the Bible says:

Genesis 1:26 (KJV)

²⁶ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: **and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.** (Emphasis Mine)

It is plain to see in the very first book in the Bible, that God has pretty much put man in charge of this planet we live on! The bottom line is that we do indeed have a lot of control, not only over our own lives, but also on the effects of the lives of others around us. This passage plainly states that we have control over all the earth! Now you can debate me on this issue, but all I will reply with is... "Don't Let The Bible Get In The Way Of What You Believe." The Bible states it plainly and precisely, thereby making our *opinions* irrelevant... it says what it says! Even so, let us dig deeper. Think about it... If God were in control of every aspect of our existence, Genesis 1:26 would not make any sense at all would it? Therefore, God gave man dominion over the earth, ***thereby relinquishing His dominion over the earth!*** Yes, God did "micro-manage" the creation process, but after that, he gave His most prized creation (humankind) the keys so to speak, to the whole creation... He left us in charge! So what, or who is responsible for all the negativity that we face on a daily basis? The answer is quite simple... for the most part, we are!

Looking deeper into the creation story in Genesis, we will also see that God was pleased with his creation; and since God is perfect, we must assume that all that He creates is perfect. The Garden of Eden was indeed a spectacular place, everything man (and woman) would ever need had been provided for them in abundance! There was only one thing left that God wanted us to have, and it was necessary so that God could receive back from man some of the abundance of love he lavished on us; this was the freedom of choice, for you cannot have true love without freedom of choice. What eventually followed is a story familiar to most people; God gave Adam and Eve one simple rule, resulting in one simple choice, and they blew it, thus spoiling God's ultimate plan for man as summed up in the following verse...

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John 10:10 (KJV)

¹⁰The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: **I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.**

God wants nothing but the best for us - all of us. However, as previously stated, **He does not control every little thing that happens in our lives!** It is important to understand that God does not cause someone to have a car wreck and kill someone to teach you or someone else a lesson. He does not put cancer on you to teach you or your family something, or to punish us. Some people are led to believe that they should consider sickness a blessing because it is “God’s will” that they are sick! If that is true...why would they ask for healing, or go to the doctor or go for Chemo... don’t they want to remain in God’s will? **Selah**

Part 2... God’s Guidance - Our Choices!

God will give us direction, and in the process, God will put or allow various situations and people into our path to guide us. However, what we do with His guidance is totally up to us, we still have the option to choose what our response to that guidance will be! The majority of the positives and negatives that we experience in life are merely the result of, (or the consequences of) the choices we make during our journey through life. Some things that happen may indeed be simply coincidence... “Wrong Place – Wrong Time... Right Place – Right Time. They are not however the result of God blessing us, or punishing us, based on our daily performance. Consider this...The moment Jesus died on the cross our performance was no longer a factor. That seemingly radical statement no doubt got someone’s attention! How you reacted to that statement depends more on how “Religious” you are, opposed to whether or not you believe God is Graceful and Merciful. The truth is, He loves us beyond all comprehension! If you have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus as the atonement for your sins, Satan might remind you of your sin, but God will not. **Hebrews 10:10 (NKJV)** ¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Our performance has nothing to do with our relationship with God after the cross.

Ephesians 2:4-9 (NIV)

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--** ⁹ **not by works, so that no one can boast.** (Emphasis Mine)

Just as Adam and Eve had one simple choice to make, we too have one simple choice to make... that is what we ultimately do with Jesus in our life. It all boils down to the one simple choice; do

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we accept Him, or reject Him? As for our performance... once again the sins of all humanity, past present and future, have been paid for (in full) by God's Son... **Jesus died only once for our sins!** Nevertheless, if we continue in sin, as stated before, we will have to deal with the consequences of our sin, but it no longer affects our relationship with God, *providing we accepted the Grace of God through the sacrifice of His only Son.*

God's Provision to Combat Negativity

So, let us go back to the negative things we continue to face whether caused by our sin or circumstance. What has God provided for us to deal with them? As we face negative situations, some of the prime emotions we deal with are confusion or lack of understanding. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to understand why things happen the way they do, to get into God's head so to speak, and have a deeper understanding of our life and the trials we endure? The Good News is that the moment you accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit of God enters into you, enabling you to do just that!

John 14:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

This Holy Spirit is the same Holy Spirit that Jesus Himself was indwelt with when he walked amongst us! With that Spirit, we gain great power - power to overcome anything the world that even Satan himself can throw at us. The only catch is that you have to call upon that power and release it through faith. You are in control that power! Nevertheless, remember, God will not interfere with your freedom of choice, the Holy Spirit does not transform you into a godly robot! All the power and wisdom you will ever need can be found in the Word of God. The more you read God's word, the more intimate your relationship with him becomes. The Holy Spirit will help you to understand, and with that understanding, will come the ability to face any trial or hardship you can possibly face. However, you can interfere with or even ignore the Spirit as the following passage implies:

1 Thessalonians 5:19 (NKJV) ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.

If you accept Jesus as your Savior, as said before, you will possess the Holy Spirit, and therefore "The keys to Victory" in any situation. Can you think of any reason why you would not want that? So, start being positive in this negative world by realizing that God is not punishing you, especially if you have received the gift of salvation through His son Jesus.

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I say again... God is not punishing you; you may simply be dealing with the consequences of going against, or ignoring God's guidance in the past! It is the same as dealing with the consequences of gravity if you jump off a cliff. Gravity is a law that applies to all, the good, and the bad alike.

It says in God's word that He (God) is no respecter of persons. *Acts 10:34-35 (ASV)* ³⁴ *And Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:* ³⁵ *but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him.*

Some things that happen to us are simply a result of going against “Natural Laws” that God built into His creation... laws that apply to the righteous and the unrighteous equally.

The Conclusion

Therefore to sum it all up, many things we may perceive, as God's punishment are a simple case of cause and effect, that would apply to anyone with the same result, just as the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross applied to all, resulting in the forgiveness of all sin - everyone's sin; even the sins of people not yet born! One of Satan's most powerful tools is Guilt... don't fall for it... you have been forgiven if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior! Another one of Satan's tools is discouragement... don't fall for that either. The reason people fall for these tricks are because they are being deceived and confused by Satan. The way to avoid confusion is to study the Word of God on a regular basis and not just superficially...really study God's word if you want to be positive in a negative world. Most of us lead busy lives. We all have obligations to meet on a daily basis, and by the end of the day we just want to “chill out” as they say. We make time to work; we make time to play. We make time for just about everything. Nevertheless, I ask you this; “how much time do you give to God and the study of his word?” It is in His word, that you will find the Keys to Victory; this is how you can be positive in a negative world. Make time for God...every day and remember the following... God loves you and He will not harm you in any way... He sent us Jesus and He died for you! As for all the turmoil we see happening around us I leave you with the following passage:

John 14: 27 (NIV)

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

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Group Leader's Suggested Questions

Part 1

1. What seems to be falling apart in our present world, What changes are we seeing taking place?
2. Have you ever felt as if there were things you would have to deal with on your own, times that you felt that your problems were too ***“petty”*** to bother God with. (Share)
3. Were there times you have felt that you had too many problems or concerns, and I felt as if it was too much to ask of God,
4. How many times have people told you that the reason negative things are happening in your life is because God is trying to show you something, or that He is punishing you for some sin you committed?
5. If God “Micro Manages” our lives, why aren’t all people saved? Doesn’t the Bible say that God is not willing that anyone should perish?

Part 2

6. What, or who is responsible for all the negativity that we face on a daily basis?
7. How does sin affect our relationship with God after we are saved?
8. What is the effect of guilt in our Christian walk?
9. What did God give us to help us deal with life here on earth?
10. What are Satan’s most effective tools?