

Optimism: Happiness *and* Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 19:2–18; Psalms 27; 42; Luke 8:14; 10:38–42; Rom. 8:35–39; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; 1 Thess. 5:16, 17.*

Memory Text: “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (*Lamentations 3:21–23, NIV*).

Two men are in prison. The gaze of one is drawn to the shiny, twinkling stars that bejewel the velvety firmament. As he takes in the beauty of this scene, he is filled with optimism and hope: there is something better beyond the bars! The other person focuses on the muddy ground surrounding the prison cells. Nothing there encourages him, and he becomes less and less optimistic. He is robbed of hope because of the direction of his gaze.

The Scriptures portray issues that apply to us today. We are not spared situations that lead to despair, even for faithful disciples of the Lord. Fortunately, God’s Word has abundant encouragement and fountains of hope and optimism.

Hope enables us to be optimistic even in troubled circumstances. This optimism affects how we feel emotionally and also influences our physical health positively, enhancing our immunity and general well-being.

We often cannot change external circumstances, but we can change our attitude toward them. This week we will look at this principle from a biblical perspective.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 12.*

To view and/or download a Hope Channel program on this week’s lesson, visit www.lifesbeat.org.

Depression and Despair

Depression is a common affliction today. Along with the general sadness that accompanies depression, there is the loss of enjoyment of those things that formerly were pleasurable. Sufferers experience tiredness, a sense of worthlessness and hopelessness, and a loss of energy. Sleep is disturbed, and various physical symptoms—digestive problems, headaches, and backache, among others—often result.

If not recognized and treated, depression even may lead to suicide. This is a problem in all age groups, but, in some societies, those 24 years and younger are especially vulnerable.

There are two main kinds of depression. The first occurs in response to unpleasant circumstances of life, such as death, illness, job loss, or a broken relationship. Everyone experiences some of these at one time or another. The other kind of depression is related to chemical imbalances in the central nervous system. This often is genetic and is as much an illness as any disease. We need to be accepting of people with these challenges and avoid judgment and stigmatization.

Below are biblical examples of great characters who suffered symptoms of depression. Who were they, and what were their symptoms?

Psalm 42

1 Kings 19:2–18

These two champions of the Old Testament suffered times when their lives were darkened by the overwhelming shadows of despair. David spent days and nights weeping. Elijah was suicidal, but, rather than take his own life, he requested the Lord to perform the deed (*1 Kings 19:4*). In today's terms, he may have lamented that he was the only Adventist upholding the standards!

In His consistently grace-filled way, God deals gently with both David and Elijah. David is impressed that he must place his hope in God (*Ps. 42:11*), and the outcome will be a praise-filled life. Having led him in a still, small voice, God reminds Elijah of his mission and from where his strength comes. Elijah then proceeds to call and start the in-service training of Elisha, who was to take his mantle.

Everyone at some point struggles with depression. While that is generally unavoidable, you still can make choices that will help avoid potentially depressing situations. What kind of choices are you making—and where will they likely lead?

The Cares of This Life

Optimism and hope often are crowded out of our lives by our busy schedules. We can become so focused on things and work, even good and necessary activities, that we lose out on our relationship with Jesus. This relationship is essential to our growth in all aspects of our lives.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about how we are to live our lives? What are the lessons we can learn from each of these examples?

Mic. 6:8

Luke 8:14

Luke 10:38–42

Luke 12:16–21

Success is coveted and sought after. Individuals often expend long hours in pursuit of this goal. How often we follow after success when our real goal should be that of significance. Is what I do, say, and think significant, or am I like the *successful* farmer in the parable who was to be called to final account and be termed a fool? (*See also Luke 21:34.*)

Martha was engrossed in the essential tasks of providing food and drink for her guests. Like us, she became so busy in the work for the Lord that she neglected the life-giving relationship with the Lord of the work. Jesus reminded her that Mary had chosen more wisely and affirmed the choice of relationship significance over work success.

And sometimes, like the seed, we can be overcome with the cares of this life in just trying to survive. This can encompass assuring the necessities for the family, education for our children, or just keeping up with providing the demands of living on this tumultuous planet. Nurturing our relationship with Jesus impacts every aspect of our lives and allows for the celebration of an optimistic and hope-filled outlook, even in times of distress and pressure.

How much of what you are doing will be remembered in eternity? In contrast, how much are you doing that will one day be eternally forgotten? What does your answer tell you about yourself, how you're living, and, perhaps, what choices you need to make?

Be Joyful Always

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 17. How are the two admonitions related?

Three decades ago much was written about praising God in all circumstances, which is fine in principle. Yet, many of these writings heaped guilt on those who were struggling to come to terms with death, loss, tragedy, disability, and heartache, as if these people were being unfaithful to the Lord and not living as real Christians because they were not joyous and happy and full of praise during these crises.

We do not always rejoice in all situations. Jesus certainly did not (*Matt. 26:38, John 11:35*), and who is going to accuse Him of being unfaithful? Job, too, though faithful to the Lord, does not appear very joyful for most of the book that bears his name. On the contrary, he is a miserable and wailing wreck.

Yet, even amid all the pain and tragedy of life, we still can have cause for joy and optimism, no matter how much these reasons might feel buried beneath the woes and cares that so greatly trouble us. And that is because, thanks to Jesus and the promises we have from Him, we know that these things only are temporary; that these things have not taken God by surprise; and that despite it all, and how hard and incomprehensible our sufferings are, God loves and cares about us. It is when we live amid suffering that we cling to these promises, that we cling to the hope before us, that we can find reason for joy and optimism, even among the worst situations.

What hope and optimism can you draw from these promises?

Rom. 8:31

Rom. 8:35–39

1 John 3:1

Rev. 21:4

What other Bible promises can you cling to, to give you reasons to be optimistic and hopeful, even amid trying circumstances? How have these texts helped you work through difficult situations?

Laughter and Healing

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10. What is Paul saying here, and how can we apply this principle in our own lives, especially in times of distress?

Norman Cousins, the author of a book called *Anatomy of An Illness*, was the editor of a popular magazine in the United States for about thirty years. In 1964 he was struck down by a disease that affected his collagen, the body's connective tissue. He suffered great pain. He had a hard time moving his fingers, his limbs, even his jaw. He found it hard to turn over in bed. Meanwhile, lumps started forming all over his body, as well. Once the diagnosis was made, the doctors prescribed all sorts of painkillers and sedatives, things like aspirin and codeine, and other drugs, including many different sleeping pills. At one point, his body started to have a reaction to the drugs, and he broke out in hives that were even more painful than the disease itself. Things were looking bad for Norman, especially because only one in about five hundred patients ever recovers from this disease.

Finally, fed up with all these medications and their bad side effects, he started to watch a popular TV show called *Candid Camera*. In bed he would laugh and laugh at the antics. Almost immediately he noticed a change. The more he laughed, the better he felt. The nurse would sometimes read him humorous stories that would make him howl with glee. Over time, the tests showed that he was getting better. Before long, the lumps on his body began to shrink, and he returned to his job. Soon after, the man who had found it hard to turn over in bed was playing tennis, playing golf, riding horses, and playing the piano!

Though no one is saying that laughter is the solution to all our medical problems, there is no question that a good attitude can have a positive impact on our health.

So often attitude is something that you can control if you really want to, is it not? What is your general attitude? How can you learn to be more optimistic? How should focusing on the Cross and what it reveals about God help you have a more positive outlook on life?

A Merry Heart—Practical Optimism!

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (*Prov. 17:22*).

Yes, there are physical benefits to laughter and joyful thinking. Laughter exercises the lungs and stimulates the circulatory system. As a result, increased oxygen enters the blood. Laughter acts as a relaxant, and in the long term it can be associated with mild decreases in blood pressure. Laughter increases the production of the chemical endorphins that soothe and relax the mind, relieve pain, elevate the mood, and increase immune cell activity. This optimism and merry heart will be entirely appropriate, because they are founded on the knowledge that God is in control of our lives.

We know that it is not possible or feasible to be happy and to laugh continuously. We can, however, seek to have a positive attitude.

Read Isaiah 26:1–4. How can you apply this passage practically in your life?

When our minds are steadfast and we trust in Him, we reap definite benefits. Studies have shown that viewing others in a positive and benevolent way can beneficially impact our resistance to infection (as well as make us pleasant to be around!). As we cultivate and nurture our relationship with Christ, our physical health is benefited, and we can find the kind of emotional and spiritual healing that can aid physical healing, too.

We are faced with a choice in Proverbs 17:22: a merry heart does good; a broken spirit has negative effects on our total being. David learned the importance of this choice and reminded himself of God’s preserving role in this ongoing struggle.

Read Psalm 27. What hope is presented here? How can we apply these words to ourselves?

There is ample evidence that a vibrant relationship with God impacts our total well-being. What changes do you need to make in order to have a better relationship with the Lord?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Mind Cure,” pp. 241–259, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father’s house?”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

“Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour’s love; and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fulness of joy; for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

“In this hope of a sure inheritance in the earth made new, the early Christians rejoiced, even in times of severe trial and affliction. “Ye greatly rejoice,” Peter wrote, “though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, . . . ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 517, 518.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Do you know someone who is suffering from depression? If so, what can you do to help? So often a kind word or even a friendly gesture can go a long way in making someone feel better. What can your class or the church do to help those with depression?
- 2 Proverbs 3:7, 8 reads, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.” How does this fit in with the lesson this week?
- 3 Next time you are feeling down, make a concentrated effort to dwell on positive things. Think about God’s love. Read some Bible texts that you especially like. Praise the Lord in song and in prayer. You might be surprised at how much better you feel.
- 4 Though the emphasis this week has been on our feelings and the importance of feeling good, we must remember that faith is not feeling. In other words, just because we are feeling down, depressed, or discouraged does not mean we have lost our connection with God. What is the difference between faith and feeling, and why is it important to know that difference?

Lead Me to Truth

by FOLORUMSO ALAWODE AJIBADE

I grew up in a church and knew well its doctrines. But I felt that some things my church taught were wrong. I read the Ten Commandments, and I knew that they prohibited worshiping idols. But when I asked the priest why we prayed before statues, he said that the images were like pictures of family members in our home. Still, it didn't seem right.

Finally I asked God to lead me to His truth. And God answered my prayer. One day as I sat in my home, I had what must have been a vision, in which I saw a banner with the words, "Seventh-day Adventist Church." I had seen a few Adventist churches in my life, but I knew nothing about what the church teaches and had never worshiped in one.

The next day, Sabbath, a Voice told me, "Go, and worship today." Another voice countered, "Don't go today; go next week." I dared not tarry. I prepared and went to the nearest Adventist church.

When I arrived, someone took my name and welcomed me as a visitor. I told them, "I am not a visitor. I will become part of this church from today." I found the people having a Bible study. Later I learned that this was Sabbath School.

I met the pastor and told him of my vision, and he came to my house several times a week to study the Bible with me. Others came to visit as well. I was glad for this.

When members of my former church asked me why I wasn't coming to church, I told them that God has sent me to the Adventist Church, and there I have found salvation.

I was baptized a few months later. I am so happy to have found the truth in Jesus. I'm only sorry that I hadn't prayed years ago that God would show me these truths. I will devote the rest of my life to sharing the gospel with everyone I meet. Leading people to Christ has become my life.

Thank you for your mission offerings, which helped bring the light of truth to this soul who was in darkness.



FOLORUMSO ALAWODE AJIBADE (left) lives in western Nigeria.