

LEADING WITH OPTIMISM

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He sat slumped in his office chair; his breathing was shallow because of his slouching posture; there was a sad pensive look on his face. He had been the preacher for the Main Street Church for several years. When his secretary asked him what was wrong, he replied, *It's these people! Church members who are only playing at church. Week after week I teach and preach my heart out and they never change. The elders only know how to conduct business meetings. Why won't people change?*

What was wrong with this preacher? Was he experiencing burnout? Was it just a normal expression of his pessimistic attitude? Had he just had a negative experience with an elder or a member of his congregation? Were there problems at home?

While we search for the causes of this preacher's attitude; one thing is obvious and that is he has fallen into a very pessimistic mindset. Does his age have something to do with the pessimism that seems to come with growing older? Is it his basic nature to be numbered among the 60% of adults who see the "glass half-full"?

In the summer of 2011, *TIME Magazine* featured a cover article entitled the "*Science of Optimism*." The article affirmed that most people have a *bias for optimism*. As a general rule of human nature, we expect things to become better than they are now. People drastically underestimate their chances of losing their jobs, being diagnosed with a deadly disease, or their chances of getting a divorce. We tend to think our children are gifted; and that we will go higher up the success ladder than others. We also think we will live longer than our peers. Is that the "Pollyanna Complex" in action?

It appears from the *Time's* articles, and other research that we humans may be "hard-wired for hope" which is optimism expressed. "Leaders," said Napoleon, "are dealers in hope." While this may or may not be true in the secular world, it is, or should be, true in the church (i.e. The spiritual world).

Every church leader should be an optimistic spreader and example of hope. Among all the leaders on planet earth, none have more reasons to be optimistic than Christian leaders in the church. But, sadly, this has not always been the case, or is it the case in some congregations today. In some congregations; especially in "business meetings", we hear some of these remarks when suggested works or programs are brought up:

- *"We tried that back in and it didn't work."*
- *"It is not the right time".*
- *"Some members won't like it".*
- *"What will others think?"*
- *"We don't have the time or money."*

- “We don’t have the manpower to do it.”
- “It won’t work.”
- “Things are okay the way they are.”

Two men look out through prison bars, one sees mud the other sees stars. Every day we are given a set of circumstances to deal with; how we deal with them depends on the attitude we choose toward the circumstance. Our lives are colored by our thoughts: *I am so blue...I’m green with envy...I have a yellow streak up my spine...I’m so mad I see red.* King Solomon said, *As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7).* It is our thinking that produces our optimism or pessimism. It is our choice.

When the subject of optimistic leadership is brought up some pundits are heard to reply, “You’ve got to be kidding! What is there to be optimistic about? The economy is a disaster. There’s not one optimistic thing I can see about it. The whole country is going down the tubes.” Guess what? This may be a church leader who brings his pessimism into the Lord’s Kingdom. Things are bad “out there” so they have to be bad “in here”.

Pessimism Kills a Victory

Pessimism isn’t something new for the leaders of God’s people. The classic case is the account of the twelve spies chosen to go on a spy mission in the Land of Promise (cf. Numbers 13-14). Their mission was to go into the land and evaluate it and bring back samples of the fruit (Numbers 13:17-21). They spent 40 days spying out the land and then returned with the evidences proving the abundance of the land (Numbers 13:21-25). Mission accomplished! The God Who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery, brought them safely across the Red Sea, sustained them so far on their journey, had been with them. Faith is the victory!

Instead of victory, the bottom starts to fall out as the spies give their reports. The first part of the report was positive (Numbers 13:26-29). In a surge of optimism because of the report, Caleb said, *Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it (Numbers 13:30).* Then pessimism takes over as the spies started to talking about how impossible it would be to conquer the land (Numbers 13:31-33). Instead of affirming the awesome power of God, the God who had sustained them so far, they cried pessimistically, *... we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, so we were in their sight (Numbers 13:33).* Pessimism has sent faith out the door.

The impact of the pessimistic observation by 10 of the spies was devastating to the people: *So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept all night (Numbers 14:1).* They wanted to form committees and return to slavery in Egypt (Numbers 14:2-5). Pessimism has robbed them of their faith; they no longer trusted the God Who had sustained them so far on their journey. Hope is gone! Pessimism reigns!

The consequences of their pessimism were amazing. Because of the negative report, which showed a loss of hope in God and His promises, and the people accepting it, the nation was sentenced to wander for 40 years before entering the land they could have

had at the time of the spies report (Numbers 14:6-45). Pessimism has consequences.

Leading With Optimism

As soldiers of Christ march deeper into the twenty-first century, the need for optimistic leadership is increasing every day. While the world is drowning in pessimism, the old ship of Zion needs to be throwing out lifelines as never before. We need to believe and follow in the steps of the apostle Paul, who wrote, *I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength*. This is an affirmation in optimism—CAN-DO—faith.

Contrary to the thinking of some, leading with optimism is not seeing the world through rose colored glasses or from a position with heads stuck in the sand. Optimism is building an ark when it has never rained. Optimism is believing you can father a child in old age. Optimism is crossing the Red Sea on dry land. Optimism is marching around the walls of Jericho. Optimism is being faithful in a lions den; and a fiery furnace. Optimism is saying on a cross, *It is finished*. Optimism is saying, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course*.

Therefore we must remember that OPTIMISM IS NOT . . .

- ... ignoring reality ... it sees reality through eyes of faith
- ... blindly going ahead
- ... refusing to acknowledge the facts
- ... doing things foolishly
- ... failing to accept advice
- ... being stubborn
- ... an ego trip
- ... a shot in the dark
- ... a wish against all odds
- ... trying to prove you are right

Optimism is about looking reality straight in the eyes and making a conscious choice to take positive steps toward succeeding. Being an optimistic leader will not only move you forward in achieving goals, it will contribute to less stress, more joy, and a longer life. We are born with most of our personality traits; we can, however, change our outlook on life from pessimistic to optimistic. Optimism can be taught. You can learn to be a more optimistic person.

Positive Traits of an Optimistic Leader

Why do optimists make better leaders? The first obvious answer is that they

accomplish more than pessimistic leaders. But there are numerous reasons that are subsets to this major reason. OPTIMIST MAKE BETTER LEADERS BECAUSE:

- They believe in God's eternal vision (Isa. 2:2-4).
- They are committed to God's Great Commission (Mk. 16:15, 16).
- They walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 4:7).
- They believe they can do all things through Christ (Eph. 3:20).
- They are committed to glorifying God (Eph. 3:21).
- They believe in the power of the Gospel (Rom. 1:14-16).
- They are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).
- They believe in the power of prayer (Jas. 5:16).
- They know God (Jno. 17:3).
- They love and obey the truth (Prov. 23:23; Jno. 8:32-26; Jno. 14:15).
- They are committed to being faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).
- They believe God's promises are real and available today.
- They make things happen—they start and finish what they start.
- They inspire and encourage others to follow.
- They communicate God's vision clearly to followers.
- They help followers develop hope for a better future.
- They always keep the larger picture in mind and before others.
- They always practice what they teach.
- They are solution focused instead of problem finders.
- They are team players.
- They speak the truth in love; and show love to everyone (Eph. 4:15).
- They freely and openly praise and encourage others.
- They are good communicators: they really listen.
- They never say no to a good idea because they didn't think of it.
- They don't care who gets the credit as long as God gets the glory Eph. 3:20)

- They seek to have the attitude of Christ in every circumstance (Phil. 2:4-9).
- They are servants of all (Jno. 13:1-36).
- They are intentional practitioners of the word (Jas. 1:22-25).
- They are committed to making things better.
- They do not show fear no matter how tough thing may appear (2 Tim. 1:7).

Among all the groups, organizations, nations, and governments that exist today none are endowed with the eternal power that the church has at her disposal. Only the church will survive in eternity (heaven). We must ask and answer this question: *If God be for us, who can be against us?* Today the local church needs optimistic leaders who believe the answer is NO ONE or ANYTHING can stop the church of Christ from accomplishing her mission.

Today is the day you must start your training to become a more optimistic leader for Christ. Here is a little quiz to get you started:

1. What in your leadership style proves you are an optimistic leader?:

2. What in your leadership styles demonstrates your pessimism in leadership?: