**Accentuate the Positive**

Johnny Mercer wrote a song in 1944 (long before my time) entitled, “Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive”. The lyrics began, “Man, they said we better accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative…” I have read that it became an instant hit, but the concept didn’t originate with Mr. Mercer. The apostle Paul was encouraging us to do just that 2,000 years earlier.

“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, dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8). Paul’s message is clear: I can brighten my outlook on life by focusing on and meditating on the positive. Mental illness aside, there are folks around us who are discouraging and hateful and frankly, miserable, because they spend most of their lives focusing on the false and the dishonorable and the ugly. In most cases, the choice is ours.

Before we embark on an attitude improvement effort, there are some important things to consider.

**God alone is qualified to define what is good.** Men who try to determine what is good and evil without listening to God always mess it up (Isaiah 5:20-21). The only way to truly discern good and evil is to learn from God’s word (Hebrews 5:14). Romans chapter 1 is an excellent example of the trouble men create when they try to go it alone.

**Our attitudes affect our relationships.** Negativity is caustic. Those who struggle to find good in life tend to focus on the flaws in other people. The fact is, most folks have a lot of good in them. Total depravity is a human doctrine that has no basis in divine Scripture. Positive minded disciples look for the true, the honor, the loveliness in people. They give others the benefit of the doubt until and unless the facts render their confidence misplaced.

**God doesn’t want us to be naïve.** Paul is not encouraging Christians to live in a fantasy world, in a constant state of denial. Evil exists; suffering is real. We can’t make our problems go away by ignoring them and pretending they aren’t there. Verses 6-7 of Philippians 4 tell us that the keys to a peace of mind that surpasses comprehension are to 1) trust in God and lay our problems at His feet, and 2) ever be mindful of the blessings He bestows and express our gratitude. Then verses 8-9 are an extension of the formula: after putting your trust in God, focus on the good things in life. Malcontent is a sign of a lack of faith in God and a lack of gratitude for the things He has done. Philippians 4 is the cure.

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