

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 Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 17:22*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Review the promises on which our faith, hope, and joy lie.

Feel: Nourish the spirit of praise by cherishing the beautiful words of life that speak of God's power and love.

Do: Dwell in the light, peace, and hope that come from God above rather than the disappointments and losses of life here below.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Power of God's Promises

A Trust in God brings health to our bodies. What are your favorite Bible texts that offer comfort and assurance of God's love and power? Discuss the comfort and assurance they bring you.

B Which Bible verses turn your eyes from your problems to God's greatness, majesty, and goodness, and why?

II. Feel: A Merry Heart

A Though difficult things may happen, if we foster an attitude of praise we can feel the sunshine of heaven in our lives. What Bible texts awaken a spirit of praise in your heart? Why?

B How can you make the spirit of praise more prevalent in your life?

III. Do: Living in God's Sunshine

A It is our duty to turn our melancholy thoughts over to God and ask Him to fill our hearts with reassurances of His love, power, and faithfulness. What habits can you develop that will keep melancholy thoughts to a minimum and praise and communion with God most prevalent?

► **Summary:** When we turn from dwelling on our problems to seeking the sunshine of God's words of hope and life, our minds and bodies are lightened and revitalized with the atmosphere of heaven.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **The promises of God are a source of hope and health.**

Hope is the spring that waters the soul, the blade that cuts through discouragement, the light that pierces the moonless night. Built on faith in an all-knowing, all-loving God who reigns unequalled, hope is fed through prayer and association with hopeful people. Paul wrote often about hope: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (*1 Cor. 15:19, NRSV*). “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Rom. 15:13, NRSV*). Studies suggest, with empirical support, that a hopeful attitude leads to physiological changes that improve the immune system. As the following story shows, children are often the leaders in living hope.

“A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, ‘Eighteen to nothing—we’re behind.’

“‘Boy,’ said the spectator, ‘I’ll bet you’re discouraged.’

“‘Why should I be discouraged?’ replied the little boy. ‘We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet!’”—Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2000), p. 451.

In a world filled with war, disease, divorce, violence, and hate, never forget that the bases are loaded and our “cleanup” hitter (God) is on deck. Before the game is over, we have won!

Activity: Gather several helium-filled Mylar balloons. Attach long strings to them and tie several different kinds of weights to the opposite ends.

Consider This: Discuss the weights we allow to keep hope from rising.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: **Ironically, Scripture is filled with despair—or at least with despairing people: the disciples after the Crucifixion, Jeremiah after Jerusalem fell, Elijah after the Mount Carmel confrontation, David after his adultery, Moses after fleeing Egypt, Adam and**

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Eve after the Fall. When we feel worthless, hopeless, and depressed, we sit with some of the greatest faith heroes in history! So, how and why did they overcome? What was the secret that allowed them to triumph? Finding that answer is the objective of our current study.

Bible Commentary

I. Depression and the Cares of This Life *(Review Luke 8:14 with the class.)*

Unrealistic expectations and unreachable goals easily can lead us into the valley of depression. This state is not a denial of faith. We may have lofty aspirations and big dreams—as long as those are implanted by God and not simply the result of our own egos. Jesus advised us to take not the choice seat but the least desirable. Then if the Master Host chooses to elevate us to a higher position, we are assured that it is God’s design, not merely our reckless pursuit of attention or success.


One doctor wrote, “If depression is common today it is because much of our lives are lived in unreality, much of our energy is devoted to the pursuit of unreal goals. . . .

“We are liable to depression when we look to sources outside the self for fulfillment. If we think that having all the material advantages our neighbors possess will make us more of a person, more at peace with ourselves and more self-expressive, we will be sadly disillusioned. When disillusionment sets in, we will become depressed.”—Alexander Lowen, MD, *Depression and the Body* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 33, 34.

Consider This: *How* does complete confidence in a loving Creator/Savior dispel many of the causes of depression? What obstacles to possessing that complete trust do we face? What does the saying “Hope is never ill where faith is well” mean? *How* did some of our biblical heroes rebound from despair to regain their faith? How does focusing on material gain and human praise make us more vulnerable to depression?

II. Joyful Always! *(Review 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 and Proverbs 17:22 with the class.)*

Some see the glass half empty. Some see it half full. We choose how we see it. Many came through the Holocaust understandably bitter while others, such as Corrie Ten Boom, worked through their bitterness and embraced the grace and peace of Christ. Perhaps the Gospels vividly

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

describe Christ's crucifixion so that we never would be tempted to think that our earthly suffering is unbearable. As we see what Christ suffered on our behalf—not just the physical punishment but, more acutely, the separation from His Father—why should we ever despair?

Paul said, "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties" (2 Cor. 12:10, NIV). He encouraged us saying, "God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand" (1 Cor. 10:13, NLT). Peter adds, "If you suffer for doing what is right God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats" (1 Pet. 3:14, NLT). Paul wrote, "What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later" (Rom. 8:18, NLT). Later in that chapter (vss. 31–39), he reminds us that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Consider This: What did the biblical heroes of faith do to maintain a joyful attitude in the face of difficulties, threats, and slander? What can we do to maintain our joy? Who is responsible for our attitude toward life? Why do two persons facing equally difficult circumstances respond in opposite ways—some in discouragement and depression, others in faith and hope?

▶ **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Hope is not a commodity we hoard, but a blessing we share. Read the following dialogue and discuss how we can be conduits through which hope flows. How is that the essence of evangelism?

PABLO. She was only thirteen! How could God do this?

MEI. She was a beautiful girl. I can't imagine the pain you must feel. We will all miss her very much.

PABLO. It's not fair. She's all I had. She's all I had left of her mother . . . and now she's gone too.

MEI. I wish that I had met her mother. She must have been a wonderful woman, for Estella was such a loving and helpful child.

PABLO. But why? Can you tell me why God had to do this? I drive by the park and see others with their wives, playing with two, three children. I had only her. Wasn't it someone else's time?

MEI. Pablo, I don't know what to say. I wish . . .

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

PABLO. I hate God. I just hate Him! Now He's taken everyone that I love away from me.

MEI, *pause.* Pablo, I've hated Him too.

PABLO. What? You? . . . Why?

MEI. I had a brother. He was bright . . . learning came so easy for him. He was a natural leader. A few years back there were protests in our city. He was an organizer. He was killed when the military attacked. I couldn't understand why God let that happen.

PABLO. But don't you go to church? That doesn't make sense.

MEI. I hated Him for a long time. I hated the government. I hated everybody. But then I learned that God lost His Son too. I found out that He lost Him to hateful murderers. Then I knew He could understand what I was going through. I knew He was going through it with me.

PABLO. But that doesn't change anything.

MEI, *pause.* Oh, I know it's hard to see now . . . but it does. There is a better world because of what God lost. There's a future without hate. There's hope. There's a place to renew the loves that were interrupted here.

PABLO. I wish I could believe you.

MEI. Maybe now isn't the time . . . but maybe someday, if you like, I can tell you what changed inside me . . . what turned my sorrow into joy.

Consider This: How might Mei have ruined her witness had she jumped in to defend God? How did God use her own painful experience to prepare her to help Pablo? What will Mei likely say when they next visit? What would you have said to Pablo? How might your past difficulties have prepared you to minister to him?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: In closing, we return to our opening balloon illustration. We opened by discussing the obstacles to hope illustrated by the balloon weights.

Activity: Now, symbolically strip the weights away, naming personal obstacles to hope, cutting off weights for each one, until the balloons are free to fly (and we are free to hope). Allowing members to write their names on the balloons with a felt-tipped pen may make the activity more personal. *Suggestion:* Play, if available, Michael Card's "Hope" (album: *poie'ma*) and/or Babbie Mason's "What Can Separate You?" (album: *Heritage of Faith*) softly during the "closing ceremony." Or alternatively, you may also sing, "We Have This Hope" (*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 214).

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*, p. 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?