

“Positive Thinking”

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I Sam. 1:4-20

Mark 13:1-8

[Hannah said,]

“I’ve been praying all this time, telling the Lord about my problems.”

Eli replied,

“You may go home now and stop worrying.

I’m sure the God of Israel will answer your prayer.” ’

I Sam. 1:

Let us pray... O God,

We thank you for answered prayer – whether we get what we want, or not.

We thank you for providing us with what we need.

Amen

What do you do to keep a positive outlook when things get tough in your life?

Or do you?

Are you the kind of person who doesn’t get headaches – you give them?

We’ve all known somebody like that – or we’ve been that way ourselves.

Win-Win would be preferable,

but it is not always possible to work things out to everyone’s satisfaction.

Win – or Lose, though, there are advantages to keeping things positive.

According to an article by the Mayo Clinic,

some of these advantages include:

Increased life span; Lower rates of depression;

Lower levels of distress; Greater resistance to the common cold;

Better psychological and physical well-being;

Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease;

Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress.

The last advantage is an important clue for understanding why

these other benefits work for improved good health.

When you are resilient in the midst of a difficult situation,

the ‘harmful health effects of stress on your body’ are reduced.

Another reason is that ‘optimistic people tend to live healthier lifestyles’ –

like those of you are out there already playing golf, pickle ball,

dragon boat racing, bocce, and tennis;

as well as eating wisely, and not smoking or drinking alcohol too much.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/positive-thinking/SR00009>

Willard, p.2

The key to maintaining an optimistic outlook is 'positive thinking' which is in contrast with 'negative self-talk'.

According to the same Mayo Clinic article:

Self-talk is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head every day.

These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative.

Some of your self-talk comes from logic and reason.

Other self-talk may arise from misconceptions that you create because of lack of information.

Then, there is that self-talk we choose to play, over and over again, like an audio tape.

Some forms that negative self-talk involve

filtering –

when we focus in on the one thing we did wrong or didn't do, while ignoring everything else that went right;

personalizing –

when you automatically assume the blame when things go wrong;

catastrophizing –

when you automatically expect the worst;

polarizing –

when you see things black or white, good or bad with no in between for perfection or failure.

Jesus himself seemed to be in a negative frame of mind

after departing the Temple of Jerusalem with his disciples.

They were like tourists, excited at seeing this great landmark of their people,

but Jesus just shut down their enthusiasm with his prophecy of doom.

He had just confronted the Temple authorities by disrupting their commerce and seemed to be in a sour mood.

He knew he was headed for the Cross.

When they got to the Mount of Olives to camp for the night,

the disciples sat down with him to talk and learn more

about what he was saying.

What he told them was even worse with wars, earthquakes, famine –

as well as trial and death for them.

In these stories of Christ we can see someone when we are

burdened with cares, yet not without hope – and at times, showing humor.

Though Jesus predicted catastrophic events ahead,

he also added this small phrase that puts it all into perspective:

"This is but the beginning of the birthpangs."

And 'birthpangs' bring babies – and babies mean hope for the future.

Willard, p.3

Hope and humor are ways to change negative self-talk into positive thinking and the Mayo Clinic article goes on to suggest these and other alternatives...

Check yourself –

Try to catch yourself playing old tapes of negativity and ask yourself why.

Be open to humor –

It's OK to find a reason to laugh to ease the tension.

Follow a healthy lifestyle –

Regularly exercise, eat healthy food, and learn techniques to manage stress.

Surround yourself with positive people –

Good friends are so important to give you reliable feedback and a boost when you need it.

Practice positive self-talk –

'Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else.'

Be courteous and encouraging to yourself.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones”, but words can still cause a lot of pain;
And a kind word can go a long way to help someone –
beginning with yourself.

As Christians we have access to a wide range of inspirational words –
such as the Book of Psalms from the Hebrew Scripture of our Bible,
the First Testament.

“The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...”

We can take our inspiration from other religions, literature, music, video
or our own imaginations.

What inspires you when you are down? What joke or song or story lifts you up?

Without God, I cannot; Without me, God will not.

is attributed to St Augustine.

I think I can! I think I can! I think I can!

is “The Little Engine That Could”.

So, let the Sun shine in. Face it with a grin.

Open up your heart and let the Sun shine in.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

This is the first verse from Psalm 46.

Where there is a will there is a way.

Keep going.

Willard, p.4
Stay on the train.

*You can't hurry love. No, you just have to wait.
Love don't come easy. It's a game of give and take.
Thank you, Diana Ross!*

Listen, or your tongue will keep you deaf.
An Indian proverb that challenges us to listen passed
external noises and self-talk.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.
That's the Jesus Prayer, an ancient prayer still present in Orthodox liturgy
as *Kyrie Eleison*.

Lord have mercy... God, help me.
I believe that is the oldest prayer, and
Thank you, Thank you, Thank you,
is the second oldest prayer.

A Way of A Pilgrim is the chronicle of a man's journey
throughout Russia in the 1800s on a quest to learn
how to 'pray without ceasing'.
He encounters a monk who teaches him about the Jesus Prayer,
encouraging him to say it to himself thousands of times a day
until it becomes an automatic 'prayer of the heart'.
This pilgrim is also given a book called The Philokalia
which is a collection of essays about prayer – especially Jesus Prayer,
written by early Christian hermits called the Desert Fathers.

One day, this pilgrim was having a meal at place for poor travelers –
like a soup kitchen and notices a blind man sitting across from him
who appears to be muttering something.

The pilgrim guessed the man was praying the Jesus Prayer
and asked him if this was so.

When he says yes, they strike up a conversation.

The pilgrim asks where the blind man is going,
and learns they are heading in the same direction.

The pilgrim suggests they travel together

and offers to read the Philokalia to him along the way

Which is what they did, as two travelers who happened to be
on the same place of their respective journeys,
with a shared passion for God.

Willard, p.5

The blind man had been praying silently just like Hanna –
for him, it was a comfort in the midst of his vulnerable condition
while for her, it was a way out of her desperation.

Prayer is an option that takes us out of the self-defeating cycle of
negative self-talk.

Prayer is an act of faith and of defiance,
because it implies hope that there is yet a way
even when we can't see our way.

Prayer opens us up for unforeseen possibilities.

Even faced with disaster,

Jesus taught his disciples to consider the possibility of a new beginning.

The benefits of positive thinking are not
freedom from stress nor trouble in our lives.

The benefits of positive thinking are
to cope with stress and keep our balance in the midst of trouble;
to embrace our challenges and
to continue the journey with confidence - come what may,
even to bring about the birth of a new world.

For Hanna, her answered prayer was in giving birth to Samuel
who would guide Israel from the old system of judges to a new one of kings.
For them and for us, God is still speaking.

Amen

*Our scripture lesson today from I Samuel 1:4-20,
tells about the patient faith of a woman
who was one of the two wives of a man named Elkanah.
Hannah had no children and her rival Peninnah did –
and wouldn't let Hannah forget it...*

Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he gave some of the meat to Peninnah and some to each of her sons and daughters.

But he gave Hannah even more,

because he loved Hannah very much, even though the Lord had kept her from having children of her own.

Peninnah liked to make Hannah feel miserable

about not having any children, especially when the family went to the house of the Lord each year.

One day, Elkanah was there offering a sacrifice,

when Hannah began crying and refused to eat.

So Elkanah asked,

“Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat?

Why do you feel so bad? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?”

When the sacrifice had been offered, and they had eaten the meal,

Hannah got up and went to pray.

[The priest,] Eli was sitting in his chair near the door to the place of worship.

Hannah was brokenhearted and was crying as she prayed,

“Lord All-Powerful, I am your servant, but I am so miserable!

Please let me have a son.

I will give him to you for as long as he lives,

and his hair will never be cut.”

Hannah prayed silently to the Lord for a long time.

But her lips were moving, and Eli thought she was drunk.

“How long are you going to stay drunk?” he asked.

“Sober up!”

“Sir, please don't think I'm no good!” Hannah answered.

“I'm not drunk, and I haven't been drinking.

But I do feel miserable and terribly upset.

I've been praying all this time, telling the Lord about my problems.”

Eli replied,

“You may go home now and stop worrying.

I'm sure the God of Israel will answer your prayer.”

“Sir, thank you for being so kind to me,” Hannah said.

Then she left, and after eating something, she felt much better.

Elkanah and his family got up early the next morning

and worshiped the Lord.

Then they went back home to Ramah.

Later the Lord blessed Elkanah and Hannah with a son.

She named him Samuel because she had asked the Lord for him.

Mark 13:1-8

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him,
"Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

Then Jesus asked him,

"Do you see these great buildings?
Not one stone will be left here upon another;
all will be thrown down."

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple,
Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

"Tell us, when will this be,
and what will be the sign that all these things
are about to be accomplished?"

Then Jesus began to say to them,

"Beware that no one leads you astray.
Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!'
and they will lead many astray.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed;
this must take place, but the end is still to come.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;
there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.

This is but the beginning
of the birthpangs."