How to stay positive in a negative world

Intro: We live in a world has become more negative and critical over the past several years. There is a tremendous amount of pain, frustration, and hard circumstances out there. We continue to have a mental health crisis and a society that is struggling emotionally. There is still a spirit of negativity has taken hold of so many. Divisiveness is the norm. Hatred runs rampant. How do we stay positive in this sea of negativity?

- No one is getting a pain free ride through this life. We all deal with negative things in our circumstances / relationships / parenting / work stress / finances / physical illness and challenges / the list goes on.
- How can we stay positive with all this going on? How do we stay positive when we live in such a negative world?
- Today we are going to try to answer this question. How can we stay positive and grow in gratitude? Since we just finished Thanksgiving, we need some encouragement that we can experience some positivity not just during a holiday.

Today I want to give you 3 ways

1. **Understand How Negativity Influences Us**
   We simply cannot afford to have an attitude that says…"So what…I seem to be negative more than I am positive. Big deal!"

   - Negativity is extremely damaging
     - **Physically damaging**
     - The effects are also drastic. Research has shown that even a small amount of negative brain activity can lead to a weakened immune system, making you more prone to illness, and even lead to a heart attack or a stroke. (Summarize this part)

     - **Mentally damaging**
     - Negative attitudes can also affect your intelligence and ability to think—according to Dr. Travis Bradberry, negativity compromises the effectiveness of the neurons in the hippocampus—an important area of the brain responsible for reasoning and memory.
     - A study in the Journal of Clinical Psychology studied the effects of worrying on performing a task. Subjects were required to sort things into two categories. People who reported that they worry 50% of the time or more showed a significant disruption in their ability to sort objects as the difficulty of the sorting task increased.

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- In a follow up study, researchers found they were able to show and demonstrate that the disruption was a result of increased levels of negative thoughts. When the brain is faced with complex tasks, negative thinking hurts your ability to process information and think clearly.
- If you have a tendency to over-react to stress, it could be due to changes in your brain brought on by negative thinking. Negative experiences are stored in the brain by the amygdala. The amygdala is also responsible for the brain's fight or flight response.
- The thalamus is responsible to sending sensory and motor signals to the rest of the body but it does not understand that negative thoughts aren't the same as real danger. When you think negative thoughts, the thalamus assumes that it needs to prepare the body to flee. As a result, our bodies experience real stress symptoms of rapid heartbeat, elevated blood pressure, and a state of heightened arousal.

- <u>Negativity is connected to our flesh</u>
  - Negativity becomes a fleshly response to life in general. Negativity becomes our filter that we begin to see and interrupt life through. As followers of Jesus, this perspective comes from our flesh. Our flesh is prone to negativity.

Rom. 8:5-6 "For those who live according to the flesh ***set their mind****s on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit* ***set their minds*** *on the things of the Spirit. [6] For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (ESV)*

- We all have a struggle going on inside us between the Spirit of God and our fallen humanity…our flesh. Do we respond like Jesus, or do we respond in our brokenness…our fallenness?
- We all have a choice to either allow our flesh or the Spirit of God to be the lens we see our lives through. I'm not saying this is easy. When circumstances are hard, painful, and often ongoing, not being negative is very difficult.
- Notice to allow our minds to be set on a fleshly perspective is destructive (death). Not that it kills you instantly…BUT, the flesh takes life from us. Negativity is a fleshly perspective that takes life from us. Even science agrees with this.
- Therefore, when God's word tells us to set our minds on the Spirit, it is telling this for our own good. It makes us healthier.

<u>HOW do I change perspectives?</u>

- The best way to get your mind on the Spirit and off the flesh is with the word of God. God's word is positive / hopeful / it gives us God's perspective on life. God's word is foundational for staying positive in a negative world.

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- You can't simply try to stop thinking negative thoughts. You must replace them with something else. God's truth is the replacement. This is the process of learning to train our minds to think on the Spirit…think God's word.
- Learn to speak God's word as well. There is power in the spoken word of God. There are times I need to speak God's truth out loud. (Explain)
- This is why Jesus told us to build our lives on His word. If we do, it's like building your house on a rock. If we do not, it's like building your house on the sand. The difference is when the storms come - explain

2. Limit Negative Influences Where Possible

It's impossible to isolate ourselves from all negativity in this life. We live in a broken world; We live with other broken people, while we struggle with our own brokenness. BUT, we still can make choices to limit some of this exposure. HOW?

- <u>Limit exposure to negative people</u>
  - This may really surprise some people but as much as we are called to love each other, we are also cautioned to stay away from some people because of their negative influence on our lives.

Rom. 16:17 "…Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith…Stay away from them." (NLT) Divisive people are unhappy, negative people. Divisive people are chronic complainers. We are commanded to avoid people like this. WHY? Because negativity is contagious.

- **University Chicago press Journal -** Negativity is Contagious
- "Though we may not care to admit it, how other people think about something can affect what we think about it. This is how critics become influential and why our parents' opinions about our life choices continue to matter, long after we've moved out. But what kind of opinions have the most effect" An important new study in the Journal of Consumer Research reveals that negative opinions cause the greatest attitude shifts, not just from good to bad, but also from bad to worse."
  - In other words, the most contagious attitudes are negative attitudes. Therefore, if you are always hanging around negative people it will have an adverse impact on you as well. Negativity is contagious.
  - Think about your social circle. Are you being dragged down emotionally by the people around you? I realize we can't get away from everyone. Some of you work in very negative work environments. BUT, sometimes we have choices in other arenas of our lives.

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- I simply do not spend time with negative people. If you are a negative person, I will avoid you. It's not because I don't love you. I just don't want to be infected with negativity.
- It is also very important for every one of us to think about how we are affecting the people around us. Our spouses / our kids / our co-workers / people we serve with in church / Are we bringing negativity to these relationships.
- If we are, we are making the people around us worse. Negativity makes everything and every person worse. We need to own our own junk. We all need to take a look in the mirror on this one. I know I have been guilty of this.

- Limit exposure to negative media

  - Why would I want to do such a thing? Share the negative effects of social media
  - Social media increases depression and anxiety
  - Do you spend more than two hours per day on social media? Spending too long on social networking sites could be adversely affecting your mood. In fact, you're more likely to report poor mental health, including symptoms of anxiety and depression.
  - Social media creates "Fear of Missing Out" syndrome (FOMO)
  - Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a phenomenon that was born at the same time as Facebook—and it's one of the most common negative effects of social media. FOMO is basically a form of anxiety that you get when you're scared of missing out on a positive experience or emotions that someone else is getting.
  - This fear is constantly fueled by your social media engagement. The more you use social networks, the more likely you are to see that someone is having more fun that you are right now. And that's exactly what causes FOMO.
  - Social media creates unrealistic expectations
  - This one probably comes as no surprise, but social media helps you to form unrealistic expectations of life and friendships. The networks that do it most are Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Those are the social media platforms that severely lack online authenticity.
  - Social media creates unhealthy sleep patterns
  - On top of increased rates of anxiety and depression, spending too much time on social media can lead to poor sleep. Numerous studies have shown that increased use of social media has a negative effect on your sleep quality.
  - Social media creates a general addiction
  - Social media is often described as being more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol. With the worst social media apps being Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat when it comes to addiction.

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Let's be honest, when it comes to positivity, we can be our own worst enemy. We truly want to be positive and happy, but we make so many decisions that actually sabotage the happiness we seek.

With all the negative influences out there, how does one stay positive? How is this possible?

3. **Make Choices That Produce Positivity**

Phil. 4:4-9 "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! [5] Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.[6] Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. [7] Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. [8]And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. [9] Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you." (NLT)

- Phil. 4 describes a spiritual, emotional, and mental pathway to live. This is the goal we are shooting for. This is the way we want to live this way moving forward.
- Let's read these verse again and notice the pathway. 7 positive choices

1. <u>Choose to rejoice</u> ("Rejoice in the Lord." Not just when things are going well) Choose to be positive.

2. <u>Treat people well</u> ("be considerate in all you do") How we treat people impacts how we feel. Treat people negatively, you will feel negative.

3. <u>Focus on eternity</u> ("the Lord is coming" – focus on the bigger picture – anytime we become myopic, it gets negative. Don't lose sight of God's greater agenda.

4. <u>Pray through your anxiety and your needs</u> ("don't worry about anything, pray instead – tell God what you need") I would never have survived almost 40 years in ministry without this. There are times you must press in closer to Jesus.

5. <u>Be thankful for what God has done</u> ("be thankful for all He has done") choose to see it every day – choose to acknowledge it every day.

6. <u>Choose what you think about</u> (fix your thoughts) We must work at creating new mental pathways in our minds. For some of you, there are deep negative ruts that are engrained in your mind. There are neurological pathways you have created.

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7. Do this consistently ("keep putting into practice") A positive pathway takes practice when you live in a very negative world.

The result of this is peace…peace of heart and mind. Peace in our emotions and our thinking. A peace that goes beyond our limited comprehension. It is a peace that comes from God.

This is how we stay positive in a negative world.

Prayer time:

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