

Pastor's Note

Hello

Most people never take advantage of God's abundant resources. Ephesians 3:30 (AMP) says, *"God is able to do super abundantly far over and above all that we dare ask or think; infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes or dreams."* That's what God can do in your life. He says, "Think of the greatest thing you can think of, and I can top that." God gives us nuclear power. He offers that to us, and we go around living fossil fuel lives. We never tap into the tremendous resources God has available for us. How do we do that? What is the key that unlocks God's great power? Well, it's right here, in Matthew 9:29 (NIV) *"According to your faith it will be done to you."*

The key that unlocks all God wants to do in your life is faith. God says, "You get to choose how much I bless your life." "According to your faith, it will be done unto you." This is what God has set out in His word; it's called the Law of Expectations. The Law of Expectations basically says you get what you expect out of life. You tend to see what you expect to see, you tend to feel what you expect to feel, you tend to act the way you expect to act, and, you tend to achieve what you expect to achieve. Expectations influence your life far more than you realize. Expectations influence your happiness, your health, and your relationships. **I. Two Approaches to Life**

When you boil it all down, there are really only two basic approaches to life and you get the choice. You can choose to live by fear, or you can choose to live by faith. Those are your two choices. You can be an optimist, or you can be a pessimist. By faith, or by fear. Now, Job was a pessimist, and in Job 3:25 (TEV) he says, *"Everything I fear and dread comes true."* You know anybody like that? They set themselves up. They focus on what they don't want, not what they do want. That's how you become a victim of a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Oh, I don't think I can do it." Then you don't do it. "See, I knew I couldn't do it." And you set yourself up as a negative pessimist and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Have you ever done that? We all have. Paul, on the other hand, was an optimist. In Philippians 1:20 (TLB) he says, *"I live in eager expectation... while I'm going through these trials."* Notice he doesn't say, "I live in eager expectation thinking of my retirement plan," or "I live in eager expectation because everything's going great." He says, "While I'm going through trials,

I live in eager expectation." He was an optimist. He could be cheerful even when he couldn't be happy.

Now, what are you expecting God to do in your life this week? Faith is expecting the best. That's what it is. Why should you expect the best? There are three reasons illustrated in a story in I Samuel, you might want to read it. It's the story of David and Goliath. In the story, it tells us David had great expectations of what God would do and it shows us that expecting the best honors God, increases your ability, and encourages others. When you expect the best, you're honoring God. You say, "I'm trusting him." It's like saying, "My daddy can do anything!" William Carry said, *"Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God, because that brings honor to the Lord."*

It also increases your ability when you're expecting the best. Athletes know that the winning edge is attitude, not ability. It's how you see it. Do you know that Mohammed Ali only lost two fights in his lifetime? And both of those fights, they had one thing different than all the other fights, in a press conference prior to the fight, he said, *"Now, if I lose this fight..."* It's the only time he ever said it, and he lost them both. When David went out to fight Goliath, he took five stones with him. Some people think, "Well, that's not much faith. I guess he was going to miss the first four times." No, II Samuel 21 tells us that Goliath had four brothers. "I'll just take out the whole family." Super confidence! Everyone else was saying, "He's too big! We can't kill him." David was saying, "He's so big. I can't miss!" Expect the best. Expecting the best encourages others. Optimism is contagious. It really is.

Now, you may be thinking, "But I'm a born pessimist. I'd like to be optimistic, but I just tend to be naturally negative. I tend to see the bad things. I tend to see what's worst. I wish I could have more faith. I wish I could be more positive, but I'm just a worrier. How in the world can I become more optimistic?" Studies have shown that faith brings optimism. The results of one Gallup poll stated, "Pollster Finds Faith, brings Optimism." It said, *"George Gallup has found some striking evidence that faith is good for you and it's good for others with whom you deal. We now have empirical evidence. Findings show that the most genuinely devout people were the happiest and also the most healthy. It also found that people who had deep faith were more ethical in personal dealings, more tolerant of people with different backgrounds, more apt to perform charitable acts, more concerned about the betterment of society, and far happier than everyone else. Noting the general assumption that 'the more religious you are the more closed-minded and bigoted you are,' Gallup*

said, *'We found just the opposite is true.'*" This is an extremely important finding. Faith brings optimism. **II.**

How to Stay Optimistic

Now, faith is like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets. So, this week, I want to give you some spiritual calisthenics, or, six ways to stay optimistic in discouraging times. How do you stay optimistic when everything seems to be going wrong? Let me give you six steps.

1. Start Your Day With Faith.

In order to stay optimistic when everything else seems to be going wrong, whether it's work or school or finances or relationships; start your day with faith. Studies show the first ten minutes of your day sets the tone for the whole day. Would you say, "I wake up grouchy in the morning?" Would you admit to that? Maybe you feel like Eeyore. You remember Eeyore? From that great theologian, Winnie the Pooh. *"Eeyore the old donkey stood by the side of the stream and looked at himself in the water. 'Pathetic,' he said, 'that's what it is. Pathetic.' He turned and walked down the stream twenty yards, splashed across and walked slowly back to the other side and looked at himself in the water again. 'As I thought,' he said, 'no better from this side. But nobody minds. Nobody cares. Pathetic, that's what it is.' There was a crackling noise in the bracken behind him and out came Winnie the Pooh. 'Good morning, Eeyore,' said Pooh. 'Good morning, Pooh,' said Eeyore gloomily, 'if it is a good morning. Which I doubt.'"*

Maybe you identify with Eeyore. Look at this verse, Psalm 5:3 (NIV) *"In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice, in the morning I lay my request before you and wait in expectation."* To start your day with faith, you go before the Lord. Now, if you tend to have a sluggish start in the morning, here's a suggestion? Don't start with the morning news. Just don't start with it, because about ninety percent of it's going to be negative. You wake up in the morning, having a hard time getting going, and you turn on Bad Morning, America. And then, while you're eating your Cheerios, you read the newspaper. And then while you're commuting to work, you listen to talk radio. It's no wonder you feel bad. Start your morning with good news, not bad news; read the Bible. Have a quiet time. Listen to some Christian music. Put on a Christian tape. Start by hearing from God before you hear from anybody else. Start your day in faith.

It's also very important to verbally affirm your faith in the morning, since the Bible tells us to do so and scientists say that the way you start your day affects your mood for the rest of the day. Affirm your faith. Psalm 118:24 *"This is the day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in*

it!"Here's your homework: for the next seven days, I want you to get out of bed, stand up and say in a strong enthusiastic voice, "This is the day the Lord has made. I WILL rejoice and be glad in it." Then duck quickly so you don't get hit by whatever it is they're throwing at you. Get up and affirm it. That's a choice!Why do you do that?" Do you know that studies have shown that optimism releases endorphins in your mind? It does! When you verbally affirm the truth, you will feel better. "This IS the day the Lord has made. So I WILL rejoice and be glad in it." If you want to be optimistic in negative times, first you've got to start your day with faith.

2. Look for the Good in your Situation.

Look for the good in your situation. Not everything's good, but look for the good in the situation. Romans 8:28 (PH) *"For those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good."* God specializes in bringing good out of bad. What's he saying here? He's saying you can be realistic and optimistic at the same time. Now, I'm not talking about psychology, self-help, you know, psych yourself up with a phony pep talk. In fact, I think that kind of stuff gives faith a bad name. I am talking about affirming the truth. Look for good in your situation and be realistic and optimistic at the same time. What is God doing in all of this, even in the bad? When Thomas Edison was sixty-seven years old, a great fire burned down his laboratories in New Jersey. He lost several million dollars' worth of equipment, and the records for most of his life's work. The next morning, he walked out among the charred embers and said this: *"There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew."* He turned a stumbling block into a stepping stone. Things turn out best for people who make the best of the way things turn out. And that's your choice. Look for the good in your situation.

3. Give Your Problems to God.

Worry comes when you assume responsibility God never intended you to have. When you start trying to play God and General Manager of the Universe, you're going to get discouraged. When the situation looks impossible, what you do is read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (TLB), *"We were crushed and overwhelmed... and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves: but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God... for He can even raise the dead. And He did help... and we expect Him to do it again and again."* Give your problem to God. When it looks like it's out of your control, give it to God.

4. Eliminate Negative Words.

Have you ever talked yourself into feeling bad? You know, "I feel so tired." Now I feel really tired. In fact, I could use a nap. You can talk

yourself into anything. You can even make yourself sick or depressed. Eliminate negative words. You can complain, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's like the hypochondriac who had written on her tombstone; "I told you I was sick!" A hypochondriac is someone who likes to speak "ill" of themselves. They can't leave "well enough" alone. Maurice Chevalier was once asked, "What does it feel like to be alive at eight-two?" He said, "When I consider the alternative, fantastic!"

The Bible has a lot to say about negative words. Because you can defeat yourself just by talking about your health all the time. Someone who talks about their stomach problems and their gallbladder, and their kidneys. It's like an organ recital. And of course, my surgery's worse than your surgery. Ephesians 4:29 (TEV) *"Don't use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up ..."* It says "use only" helpful words. That means you should not have negative words in your vocabulary. Now this is a major theme of the New Testament; to be positive when you talk. Why? Because it's expecting the best and that is a demonstration of faith and without faith, it is impossible to please God. I'm not talking about a phony pep talk. You know, "What the mind can conceive, you can achieve." That's just not true. I can conceive a lot of stuff I can't achieve. I'm not saying that. What I am saying is, expect the best and affirm the truth, as Joel 3:10 (KJV) says, *"...let the weak say, I am strong."*

James 3:5 (TLB) says, *"The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do!"* Do you agree with that? You can set yourself up for failure. You can set other people up for failure. "Oh, you'll never amount to anything." "You'll never change!" Oh, that's really good. You're just labeling them, guaranteeing they won't change. "You'll never change! Is that same as saying, "You can't do it." The tongue, the Bible says, is like a rudder on a ship. It's small, but it sets the course of your life. And so you have to eliminate negative words if you're going to be optimistic in discouraging times. Stop focusing on what you don't want and focus more on what you do want.

5. Associate with Positive People.

One of the things that helps you focus on what you do want rather than what you don't want is associating with positive people. It is very important in discouraging times that you attach yourself to hopeful people. That's one of the reasons why it's good to join a good, warm, family church. Get around some positive people. Because the wrong crowd can bring you down. 1 Corinthians 15:33 (TEV) says, *"Bad companions ruin good character."* If you want to soar with the eagles, you can't run with the turkeys. Psalm 1:1 (CEV) says, *"God blesses those people who refuse evil"*

advice and won't follow sinners or join in sneering at God." It means he doesn't hang around with cynics, doesn't hang out with skeptics. Why? Because pessimism is just as contagious as optimism is.

By the way, that is one of the big causes of economic upturns and downturns. Economics, to a large degree, is a matter of expectations. When enough people expect things to be bad, guess what? They get bad. And you know when they say that we'll be having recovery? When enough people say, "I think it's getting better." It's a matter of expectations. Associate with positive people because bad companions ruin good character. Now, I'm not saying you need to go drop all your unhappy friends. Alcoholics Anonymous says, *"Everyone needs a couple of neurotic friends that you can work on."* But don't get too many of them or they'll drown you. That's good advice. Associate with positive people.

6. Remember your Future.

Remember your future when you're discouraged and you want to be optimistic. The Bible calls it our blessed hope, that if you are a believer and you put your faith in Christ, the final chapter has not been written yet. This life is not the end. There is heaven. There is the coming return of Jesus Christ. And that gives us hope. Heaven is what we're waiting for. And when things seem tough and discouraging and difficult, remember that if you're living your life the way Christ wants you to live it, God is watching, and you will be rewarded. You can count on it. That's encouraging. He's watching and one day you will be rewarded. You've placed your life in the hands of Jesus Christ.

At the end of World War II, General Eisenhower was coming home from the European war, the victor, and when he got off the plane in New York, there were thousands, hundreds of thousands of people with banners that said, "Welcome home, Ike!" And they were throwing ticker tape and they had rolled out the red carpet and thousands of people were there to welcome him in this "Welcome Home" party and victory. On that same plane, there was a missionary who had spent his entire life in Africa, serving God. His wife and his children had both died of malaria, and he was dying, a broken man, in poor health. And as he came down off the plane, there was nobody there to greet him. And he saw all these banners and crowds and ticker tape and red carpets. He said he began to have a little pity party and feel sorry for himself. He said he felt like the devil was kind of whispering in his ear, saying, "You could have had all this, but you gave it up. You served the Lord for fifty years and there's nobody here to greet you. Nobody here to welcome you. Nobody here to make you feel warm and happy and accepted. You've wasted your life!" He said he started to

feel pretty bad, and then, all of a sudden, God just kind of whispered in his ear and said, "But wait a minute, son, you're not home yet." I Corinthians 2:9 (TLB) *"No mere man has ever seen, heard, or imagined what wonderful things God has ready for those who love the Lord."*

You won't be in heaven for thirty seconds, if you're a believer, and you will say, "Why on earth did I get discouraged when I knew what was coming? Why didn't I serve more, pray more, give more, love more, be more what God wanted me to be?" You're not home yet. "God is able to do super abundantly over and above all that we dare ask or think." Infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes and dreams. That's almost like a blank check. God says, "You think of the greatest thing I can do in your life, and I can top that. I'm able to do far beyond what you could even imagine." And the key; *"According to your faith, it will be done unto you."* Now here's the question. What in the world are you expecting God to do in your life this week? What are you expecting Him to do? You don't expect Him to do anything? Guess what? God works according to your faith. *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."* Faith is expecting the best. And God is doing in your life exactly what you expect Him to do.

When you study the ministry of Jesus Christ, you find that He almost always did more than what was expected. A guy came to Him to be healed, He not only healed him, He forgave his sins. They expected Him to send the crowd away, instead, He did a miracle and fed five thousand. They expected Him to put up a fight and resist going to the cross, instead, He went to the cross and died and rose again. More than expected. God wants to do that in your life. Living by faith is expecting the best. You expect the best.

Which of two approaches to life are you living? Are you living by fear or are you living by faith? Are you a pessimist or are you an optimist? If you haven't committed your life to Jesus Christ, you have every reason in the world to be worried. You really do. Because you're trying to solve all your problems out there under your own power. And it's no wonder you're tired and frustrated. Maybe you're worried about something you're facing in life right now. And expecting the worst is draining your energy. Are you to the point where you're simply tired of being afraid? As your pastor and as your friend, I want to say to you, relax; take a deep breath. Trust Jesus Christ with every detail of your life because He is able to do super abundantly, far over and above all you dare ask or think. And according to your faith, it will be done to you. Don't miss the best life has to offer. Find God!

Blessings,

Scott

