

5 Health-Changing Reasons to Focus on the Positive

You'd have to be living under a rock not to notice how the world seems to be spinning out of control politically, economically, spiritually and even meteorologically.

From escalating acts of terrorism around the world to unprecedented weather patterns above it, students of Scripture are watching as Jesus' prophetic words unfold into reality:

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, epidemics, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt. 24:7-9, MEV).

In a previous article, I wrote about five ways in which fear damages our health. For example, fear can weaken your heart and your immune system, as well as lead to depression. Focusing on the chaos swirling around us and fretting about the future can easily breed health-threatening fear.

We quickly become blinded to the astounding work of the Holy Spirit, deaf to His call for us to join Him in the harvest, and insensitive to the impact He is having on the hearts of millions. The bad news makes the Good News seems distant and detached from the crises we face today.

As I was reading in Proverbs this week, I sensed God speaking to me regarding my own fixation on the ever-sensationalized news and disheartening current events that compose a vast amount of the media I see each day. Chapter 15, verse 30 reads:

"The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report

makes the bones healthy” (Prov. 15:30, MEV).

If good news equates to good health, then to what does bad news equate? I know that for me personally, it equates to fear, which as I mentioned earlier, can wreak havoc on our bodies.

Before I write any further, I want to clarify that just as I don't believe it's necessary or even correct to ban my clients from ever eating cupcakes or cheeseburgers, I similarly am not suggesting that we swear off tuning into the nightly news or averting our gaze from heart-rending headlines. (Being informed enables us to pray more specifically, which is one reason we shouldn't bury our heads in the sand.) I simply wish to point out what God's Word has to say about thinking on the positive, or in Paul's terms, on what is “*pure*” and “*lovely*” and “*of good report*.”

In these last days, we must not let the enemy pollute our minds and stifle our spirits by stealing our joy. There is much to look forward to and much beauty and goodness to share and experience as we endure until Christ's Kingdom comes.

Here are a few reasons why we should make a concerted effort to focus on the positive, not just for the sake of our emotional health, but our physical health as well:

1. Improves longevity. In a study of nearly 1,500 people with an increased risk of early-onset coronary artery disease, those who reported being cheerful and relaxed had a one-third reduction in coronary events like a heart attack. Those with the highest risk of coronary events enjoyed an even greater risk reduction of nearly 50 percent. This was true even when other heart disease risk factors, such as smoking, age and diabetes, were taken into account.

2. Improves cell immune function. Clicking away from the talking heads to a few laughing ones will do more than make you chuckle—it will make you healthier! Humor improves immune

cell function, helps you ward off illness, decreases your chances of cancer, and also increases your chance of living after heart disease hits. There is power in a good “LOL!” Of course, it’s best to ward off heart disease before it occurs by eating healthy, managing your stress, and exercising regularly.

3. Reduces frequency of colds and the flu. Psychology Professor Sheldon Cohen, of Carnegie Mellon University, found that optimistic people are less likely to get more mundane, day-to-day illnesses (like a cold), and even when they do they are less likely to report symptoms. Essentially, “happy” emotions like optimism and self-esteem send signals from the brain to your body’s organs, strengthening immunity.

4. Boosts motivation. When you look for the silver lining behind every cloud and choose to remind yourself of the Good News’ power of the ubiquitous bad, you will naturally feel more motivated to form healthy habits that will enable you to lead a fulfilled life, such as eating nutritious foods, exercising daily, reading and listening to enriching material, spending quality time with loved ones, and lending a helping hand to total strangers.

On a biological level, being active in particular causes your body to release endorphins, which are chemicals that make you feel good—no major athletic ability needed. Endorphins even have the capacity to relieve depression and anxiety. And, when working out makes you happy, you’re going to continue to do it, creating a healthy cycle of happiness as you honor the body God’s given you.

5. Decreases stress. Did you know that the simple act of smiling has been shown to decrease stress levels? A smile sends a message to your brain that you’re happy, which then signals it to pump out feel-good endorphins. When this happens, your breathing and heart rate slows, thereby helping you de-stress. And as an added bonus, smiling is contagious!

Studies show that something as simple as seeing a friend smile can activate the muscles in your face to make that same expression, without you even being aware that you are doing it. (Sounds like the yawning phenomenon, doesn't it?)

This week, I challenge you to look on the bright side, to seek out the goodness in the world around you. Take breaks throughout your day to think of and thank God for your blessings, no matter how small they may seem to you.

Smile at a co-worker or a salesclerk who seems to be feeling blue. Read a blog that makes you laugh, or shamelessly watch a funny cat video on YouTube. Go to the park and throw the Frisbee around with your kids. See a Pixar movie with your spouse. Anything that will make you smile will make your soul shine as well.

"A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22, MEV).

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