

Yes, I'm Positive

Written by Chris Tiegreen

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I've never been known for positive thinking. For as long as I can remember, my mind has far too easily embraced negative patterns. I've struggled with discouragement and even depression at various times in my life, and I've had to spend quite a bit of time retraining myself to be hopeful and optimistic.

I've been pretty successful at that in recent years. Change is hard, and old mental pathways can't be redirected without a considerable amount of persistence. But over time, they can be—and should be. We are told to be transformed by letting our minds be renewed. I've taken huge strides in that process.

So when I wrote [Unburdened](#) a few years ago, I recommended a lot of positive thinking—not the convince-yourself-of-what-isn't-true positive thinking, but the kind that focuses on actual, biblical truths that are good and encouraging. I wanted readers to embrace the realities that, according to God's promises to his children, are unrelentingly good and redeemable and hopeful.

Well, imagine how this historically negative thinker felt when his book was criticized by some for "positive thinking theology." Apparently, some people out there assume that if you're convincing yourself of something hopeful and encouraging, you must be convincing yourself of something that isn't true—as if the positive is fake and the negative is more real. As I've learned in the last few years, being more "realistic" is, according to scripture, often completely out of touch with reality. And if biblical truth is positive—take the first few verses of Psalm 103, for example—then you'd better learn to think positively.

Look at it this way: if God tells me I'm a completely new creature and I keep focusing on my mistakes and regrets, am I being "realistic" or denying the truth? If God assures me that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I choose instead to emphasize the difficulties that also seem to follow me, am I not denying the hope of the gospel? If God gives a promise in his Word and, in applying it to my life, I say with great tentativeness, "I hope so," am I not questioning his integrity?

If someone believes cynical or skeptical thinking is an accurate reflection of truth, then positive thinking would certainly be worthy of criticism. That's fine for someone who doesn't believe in biblical revelation. But a Christian who claims the Bible is true and then fully embraces

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discouraging thoughts about his circumstances or his future is denying his own beliefs. Even if he thinks he's being “realistic.”

I realize it has become somewhat trendy in Christian circles to “be honest” (translation: negative). And believe me, I’m all for honesty. There’s nothing wrong with being transparent about your struggles. I’ve written whole books about wrestling matches in prayer and the problem of pain. I’ve fought many of my inner battles on the printed page for all to see. I get the whole authenticity thing. But it’s not inauthentic to choose to think good things. A plastered smile and a “praise the Lord” while you’re dying inside may be inauthentic, but hope isn’t. No matter how trendy negativity is, it still doesn’t line up with biblical revelation.

You see, negative minds—and fallen human nature is usually negative by default—have to convince themselves of what’s true. “Positive” doesn’t come naturally. That means we have to train ourselves to believe all the hopeful, encouraging truths that don’t come to us easily. And that renewal process, believe it or not, is . . . dare I say it? . . . *positive*.

You are not called to think negative thoughts. None of us are. Anxiety, fear, hopelessness, dread, pessimism, bitterness, and discouragement are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ever. Instead, we are called to relentless hope in God's goodness and enthusiastic affirmation of the good news—which, if I may be so bold as to point out, is actually good.

So a word to those out there who think positive thinking is shallow: if it’s based in biblical revelation, it’s reality. And it may be a whole lot deeper—and require a lot more maturity and strength—than you think.