

Message: “Positive Impact, Moment by Moment”

A girl desperately wanted a new bicycle. Her plan was to save her allowance until she finally had enough to buy a new 10-speed. Each night, she asked God to help her save money. Kneeling beside her bed, she prayed, "Dear Lord, please help me save my money for a new bike. And please, Lord, don't let the ice cream truck come down the street again tomorrow.”

We need a little humor each day. It’s a positive emotion and it lifts us out of our tiredness, anxiety, depression and hopelessness.

Last week we heard about the effects of negativity. The mirasmus, or lack of resistance, caused by mental isolation can remove our motivation. And without motivation, we can die, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically. Thankfully, we have Jesus to turn to and the good work of Dr. Don Clifton who asked the question:

Can positivity have an even stronger impact than negativity?

There’s a reason why telling people about Jesus is good news. It’s good because God hears us. And Jesus is with us. This shows us God’s love is more powerful than isolation, loneliness, anger, fear, sin, and even death. This gives us hope. There’s no place so desolate the light of God’s love, the light of life, can’t enter and dispel the evil there.

So, we can answer the question with a resounding YES! Clifton’s study also gives us the theory of the bucket and the dipper. It’s like this:

- **“Everyone has an invisible bucket.**
We’re at our best when our buckets are overflowing and at our worst when they’re empty.
- **Everyone also has an invisible dipper.**
Each time we interact with people, we can use our dipper either to fill or dip from their buckets.
- When we choose to fill others’ buckets, **we fill our own.**
- When we choose to dip from others’ buckets, **we dip from our own.”**¹

¹ *Ibid*, p. 25

It's a simple proposition. Filling a bucket is a positive emotional and spiritual act. Dipping from a bucket is a negative emotional and spiritual act. Both have consequences. We've heard the negative consequences. The positive consequences are more powerful and far-reaching.

Saying "yes" prompts a question: What impact does positivity have?

Dr. Clifton and his team set out to find an answer. They started with employees in organizations since that was their area of expertise. They surveyed more than 4 million people, across 30 industries and 100 organizations worldwide. What they found was amazing.

People who received positive emotional support felt better.

- People felt better about their group and shared a better mood.
- People felt more engaged with their colleagues.
- People were more productive and groups performed better.
- People were more satisfied and likely to stay with a group.
- People had better safety records and fewer accidents.
- People had better health such as a 33% less chance of stroke.²
- People felt the positive energy of the group and reported a higher degree of satisfaction and loyalty to the group.

One leader called bucket filling a "secret weapon."³ They said the most enjoyable part of bucket filling was "watching positive energy move through the group."⁴ It's possible to light up an entire room with a few brief energizing conversations. Sadly, the reverse is also true. People who are actively disengaged from a group can be very counterproductive, stirring up trouble and anxiety by complaining.

The greatest bucket filling tools are authentic recognition and praise. Sadly, praise is rare in many places. One poll found 65% of Americans received no recognition for good work in the last year!⁵ On the flip side, no one has ever reported being over-recognized. When they talk about recognition, it's not the Employee of the Month programs. Those can become formulas. They're talking about sincere, deserved and individualized recognition.

² Material drawn from Rath and Clifton, *How Full is Your Bucket?*, Gallup Press, 2004, pp. 31-32

³ *Ibid*, p.29

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 39

This leads us to today's topic: positive moments.

We don't usually stop to consider the impact of our brief interactions with others. But we literally experience hundreds of potential turning points in a given day. Most of us want more positive emotions in our lives. 99 out of 100 people say they want to be around positive people. 9 out of 10 people say they're more productive around positive people.⁶ So being positive is a good thing.

Sadly, wanting a more positive environment isn't enough. Paul knew this. He wrote, *"The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it"* (Romans 7:18a-20). We're battling ourselves inside.

Good intentions and bad behaviors end up in gridlock. Paul tells us the Holy Spirit is the only one with the power to break the tie. We can turn to the Spirit for help in each moment. Sadly, we've grown up in a culture where it's easier to tell people what they did wrong, rather than praising them when they succeed. This negativity-based approach permeates our society at all levels.

For example, consider the experience of children in school.

Negativity tends to discourage individuality and encourage conformity, despite parents' good intentions for a more positive learning environment. Seventy years ago, a study showed this.

Dr. Elizabeth Hurlock explored what would happen if fourth and sixth grade students in a math class received different kinds of feedback on their work. Dr. Hurlock wanted to find out if it was more effective to praise, criticize or ignore students. The outcome was determined by how many math problems were solved each day during a weeklong study. Each day's results were compared to the first day's results.

The results were dramatic and clear. "71% of those praised improved, 19% of those criticized improved slightly, 5% of those ignored showed slight improvement. The group receiving praise improved significantly more than others; four times better.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47

Dr. Clifton's team shows us two things. First, negative emotions can be harmful to our health and might even shorten our life. And positive emotions are essential for survival."⁷ Maybe we all need FDA stickers informing people about our need for a recommended daily allowance of positivity! Not only do positive emotions improve our physical and mental health; they can also provide a buffer against depression, anxiety and illness.

Dr. Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winner, says we experience "about 20,000 individual moments in a waking day."⁸ Take a few seconds and think about a strong memory. The image in your mind is tied to a precise moment in time. Rarely do we remember neutral encounters. Memorable moments are almost always positive or negative.

In some cases, a single incident can change your life forever. Can you remember a teacher who had a great impact on your life? Perhaps a mentor who said something that showed great recognition and carried great meaning in your life? Perhaps your parents touched you this way?

Do you remember a time when you "just knew" Jesus was your Savior? When we encounter Jesus in a real, meaningful way, it changes our life forever. Our perspective shifts in a moment. When we realize there's a God and God wants to save us from ourselves and show us the way to eternal life in heaven, our view of the world changes. It doesn't mean our circumstance or situation will change, but we can see the positive where before we could only see the negative.

One of the benefits of relying on Jesus is we begin to see God's presence in the everyday things and especially in the people around us. We see opportunities to experience God's love. We begin to see ways to share God's love with others. We also want to make a positive impact, particularly on those who are closest to us.

How do we make a positive impact? Let's talk math. Research suggests there is a "magic ratio" of positive to negative interactions. For example, John Gottman studied marriages. He and his team did a study

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 51-53

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 53

with 700 couples. They interviewed the couples for 15-minutes and counted the number of positive and negative interactions they observed. Then they made a prediction on whether the marriage would last or not. Ten years later they followed up with the couples. Amazingly, the predictions made after a 15-minute interview were 94% accurate.

What Gottman's team found was this: marriages are significantly more likely to succeed when couples' interactions are near 5-to-1, five positive interactions for every negative interaction. When the ratio approaches 1-to-1, marriages are more likely to cascade to divorce. They also learned that small, positive emotional interactions offset even large, negative emotional interactions.

It's important to love others and to build each other up positively. Paul wrote, "*everything is permitted, but everything isn't beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn't build others up*" (1 Corinthians 10:23). When you show love to another person, it's a good thing. God is present. Let's open our hearts, minds and doors in what we do as well as what we think and say. God will bless us when we do.

There's an important note: while we're talking about ways to increase positive emotion, it's important not to ignore negativity and weakness. Positivity must be based on reality. False optimism is counterproductive and not authentic. There are times when we need to correct mistakes or manage weaknesses. False optimism isn't usually the problem. We may be dipping from the bucket more often than we are filling the bucket. Most of us have room to improve. Trust is a big factor, at home, at work and, yes, even in church. Trusting each other in love is important.

I pray you will take the words of this message to heart as you leave today. Jesus said, "*Good people bring out good things from their good treasure*" (Matthew 12:35a). Your treasure is a good heart. So, let's go and love others, making friends and sharing God's love and our lives in a positive, encouraging way, moment by moment.

We can make a positive impact in Jesus' name.

Let us pray ...