

See the Sunny Side

by Lou Stoops

I have learned optimism. While there may be many people who are optimistic by nature, I'm not one of them. I've had to learn to approach life optimistically. I could be negative and pessimistic if I wanted to, but I don't want to.

Optimism is a paradigm of hope; it sees life's setbacks as temporary, thus allowing for a comeback. Pessimism, on the other hand, views setbacks as permanent. Pessimism lessens the likelihood of achievement. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that being optimistic is the better way to go. In fact, there is evidence that optimism is healthy for the body as well as the soul.

Dr. Daniel Mark of Duke University did a study involving over 1,719 men and women that had heart disease. The pessimists, not believing they would recover, fared worse than the optimists. Of the pessimists, 12 percent died within the first year. Only 5 percent of the optimists died! It's clearly better to have hope.

It should be noted for all you non-optimists that optimism can be learned and its benefits are documented in research done by Dr. Martin Seligman, in his book, *Learned Optimism*.

One interesting example from his study has to do with an experiment conducted with the swim team at the University of California at Berkeley. The purpose of the experiment was to reveal which swimmers were optimists and which were pessimists.

Coaches falsified the results of each heat so the swimmer was defeated, with a slower time than was actually attained. The optimists responded by swimming faster in the next heat, while the pessimists swam slower. Pretty significant effect, don't you think?

One of those Berkeley swimmers was Matt Biondi. He swam seven events at the Seoul Olympics. During the first event, though leading throughout, he slowed down and lost his lead and the heat. However, as an optimist, he determined to do better and ended up winning the next six medals!

Optimism's secret is that it produces perseverance and perseverance produces achievement. Samuel Johnson was correct when he said, "Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance." Over the years, I've learned that an optimistic attitude enables me to try again and again until the achievement is gained.