

POSITIVE THINKING, NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Opening Questions:

- Do positive thinking philosophies represent reality well?
- What is the purpose of positive thinking philosophies?
- Does believing something make it true?
- Is it possible that positive thinking philosophies are detrimental to most people?

The philosophy of positive thinking has no doubt been around in some version for a long time. Author Norman Vincent Peale wrote a very popular book entitled, "The Power of Positive Thinking" that was published in 1952, thus he could be credited with promoting the latest version of the philosophy in the U.S. In more recent times, religious leader Robert Schuller made positive thinking popular and widely accepted among U.S. citizens particularly religious ones.

Here is what this author believes is a good quote summing up the belief:

“Positive thinking is a mental and emotional attitude that focuses on the bright side of life and expects positive results. A positive person anticipates happiness, health, and success, and believes he or she can overcome any obstacle and difficulty.”⁴⁸

At face value, this belief is very appealing to many people. It promotes "happiness, health, and success" and it appeals to the "I can do anything" crowd. Stated another way, the belief can easily be used to inflate one's ego or boost one's self-esteem.

Two questions are relevant to ask about the philosophy. First, can it be found in the teachings of Joshua of Nazareth? Second, does it make people better human beings?

The answer to the first question is no, Joshua does not teach it. Perhaps the easiest way to demonstrate what he teaches would be to contrast it with the positive thinking summary above. Here are the two statements together for easy reading:

“Positive thinking is a mental and emotional attitude that focuses on the bright side of life and expects positive results. A positive person anticipates happiness, health, and success, and believes he or she can overcome any obstacle and difficulty.”

⁴⁸ Taken from www.successconsciousness.com/index_000009.htm

"Faith is a core level trust in God that focuses on our Father's love for us and our responsibility to seek and promote truth and rightness. A person of faith has Hope for their future with their Father; believes that love can overcome all of humanities worst problems, and works to help others."

As you can see, the two summaries are incompatible. The positive thinking philosophy is inherently selfish...it is all about *me* and how I can achieve happiness, health, and success for myself. The way of faith in Joshua, on the other hand, is other's focused and has us seek to give away, not take since it is love based.

With that contrast, we have also answered the second question. Any life-philosophy which encourages selfishness will not produce better human beings from God's perspective or a standpoint that a selfless life is a better life than a selfish life.

The reader might ask, what about the glass-half-full versus half-empty truth doesn't that support the positive thinking philosophy? No, it does not. All it proves is that different people can look at the same physical thing and use different words to describe it. For a selfless person in a particular situation – say taking care of a sick person who needs to hydrate - they could look at the glass half empty and say, "Oh, its half empty, good, I'm glad Rebecca drank half the water." I would suggest the glass half empty phenomenon is primarily situational and the same person could judge that differently depending on their situation or "where" they are in their life.

I do not deny that certain people have a general outlook of either optimistic/positive or pessimistic/negative. I also think that people with the former will likely have less stress and stress does put a load on our biological systems sometimes creating or exacerbating health problems. However, neither of those facts support that the positive thinking philosophy is true or that it is ultimately beneficial to people. As we have seen, the positive thinking philosophy is, at its core, selfish. And as we have seen, selfishness is a primary root problem of human beings. There are far better ways to reduce stress than living in a selfish, comfortable bubble.

The selfish focus of the positive thinking philosophy is very damaging in that it is in fact used to justify ignoring bad things in the world. For example, imagine the doggedly positive thinking person walking amidst the aftermath of a bombing scene, with severely injured people crying out in pain and suffering and needing help. Now, according to their philosophy, they will be trying real hard to find the "bright side of life" in that situation, and so their natural reaction must be something like, "I'm glad it wasn't me"; or "oh, don't be so upset, you only lost one leg, not both legs"; or, "the pain could be worse". Of course, upon walking upon the scene, they could also turn around and walk away to save themselves the difficulty of maintaining a selfishly positive view in that scenario. What they certainly will not think about is "why did this happen," because the answer will NOT fit into their white-washed delusion of "reality."

Ultimately, the positive thinking philosophies are used by people as part of their selfish helmet, as we learned earlier. They will use that belief to filter out

things that will not contribute to their attaining “happiness, health and success.” If you are a selfless person with compassion for others (“blessed are you who weep for others”), then you will see the injustice, pain, and suffering in the world and you will seek to help people—you will work to bring what you believe is the solution to help others. If you are trapped in a selfish view due to a positive thinking belief, then you will look to primarily help yourself attain the happiness, health, and success you believe you deserve.

A final illustration for this topic: Two people were walking in the desert, dying from thirst. They happen upon a partial glass of water. The positive thinking person sees the glass and says, “wow, a half-full glass of water” and runs to drink it to attain happiness, health, and success. The person with faith and love says, “wow, I’m glad you are now likely to survive...enjoy the water.” They both die while trying to escape the desert. The positive thinker goes to the destiny he/she choose with his/her selfish life-guiding philosophy of positive thinking. The person with faith goes to the future he/she decided with his/her selfless/love life-guiding faith. To believe that both destinies are the same is to deny the metaphysical conscience that is trying to inform you otherwise.

So, what dominant false beliefs, inadequate views, and means to deceive are left? How about religion! Let us take a very brief and straightforward (whew!) look at religions other than Christianity in the next and last chapter of this section. In so doing, we will have completed the process of identifying wrong concepts and wrong ways of thinking that block a person from using reason well to properly evaluate the successful failure that is Christianity.

Chapter Summary:

- Positive thinking philosophies or beliefs often ignore what is real and true;
- Positive thinking philosophies and beliefs are inherently selfish and encourage the person believing them to be primarily concerned about themselves;
- Different perspectives on the same thing – like a glass of water filled halfway – can exist, but the different perspectives don’t change reality, they only allow for different potential reactions to reality;
- A person will never be more positive or improve upon the truth that they have a Father who loves them dearly; and that loving others – behaving selflessly motivated by compassion for others - is the best way to have a fulfilling life;
- A positive belief or attitude will not produce eternal life, and every person can have a much-improved existence after death if they are willing to give up the selfish life.