

LEAVING LEFT BEHIND

How Positivity Will Help Christians Flourish

Group
Study

Two options:
10-week study
5-week study

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Introduction (Video 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Are you generally an optimist or a pessimist?
2. Does it resonate with you that positive people are more successful? Can you think of any specific examples of positive people who are successful?
3. How do you feel about progress and human history? Is the world improving or declining?
4. Why do you believe anxiety and pessimism are rising in America despite the fact that standard of living is improving?

If you are doing the 5-week study, jump to video 2. You can do this section later.

1 John 4:11-21

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Fear has no place in the life of a Christian. The closer we are to God, the less power fear has over us, because we feel God's continual presence-his strength, his comfort, and his guidance. When God, the creator of the world, lives in us, we can be confident of our eternal destination, and this world can ultimately do nothing to harm us in any lasting way.

Going Deeper

5. What do you think it means that "perfect love drives out fear"?
6. What role does the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians play in helping them to be more positive?
7. How can love help Christians to take advantage of the benefits of positivity, and how does fear hinder Christians?

Chapter 1 (Video 2)

Discussion Questions

1. What can Christians do to make the church more irresistible to outsiders?
2. How does a person find comfort in realistic optimism without falling for blind, pie-in-the sky optimism?
3. Why do the negative things that happen in the world get more attention than the positive things?

If you are doing the 5-week study, end here for the week. You can do this section later.

Acts 8:1-8

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

Luke 21:12-13

But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me.

Perhaps it was the positivity of Christians that caused persecution to advance and rejuvenate the followers of Christ. Some of the original success of evangelism came as a result of persecution. As the Church was persecuted, they spread out geographically, taking the gospel with them. Jesus warned His disciples of persecution, but He also encourages His audience that persecution would give an opportunity for evangelism.

Going Deeper

4. What gave the early Christians the confidence and strength to stay faithful to Christ in the face of persecution?
5. How did persecution help to spread the gospel around the world?
6. Do you believe Christians in America are regularly persecuted? When American Christians are offended by non-Christians, they often claim to be persecuted. Is that watering down the word "persecution" and taking away from the suffering of martyrs?

Chapter 2 (Video 3)

Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts about the current state of the church in America? Is it declining?
2. Do you think Christians are seen as negative people or is that a misperception that non-Christians have of us?
3. How can Christians be full grace and truth in the homosexual conversation?
4. What can the church do to change the way outsiders think of us? Is that even a worthwhile endeavor?

If you are doing the 5-week study with a group end here for the week, you can do this section later.

Matthew 16:13-19

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” 14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

It is important to recognize that there are some discouraging realities about the church in America because the church needs a reality check. Only then will it begin to understand the pit it is in and find a way to get out of it, but the church is not in danger of death. It is built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ, and “the gates of Hades will not conquer it.”

Going Deeper

5. When Jesus said, “on this rock I will build my church,” what is the “rock” that He was referring to? Is Peter the “rock?” Or is it Jesus, the “Messiah, the Son of the living God,” that is the rock?
6. How firm is the foundation of the church? If the church is built on the rock, what does it mean that the “gates of Hades will not overcome it?”
7. What does it mean that we have been given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven?”

Chapter 3 (Video 4)

Discussion Questions

1. How can believing we have already arrived or accepting the way things are cause a person to become complacent?
2. When the widow in Luke 18 pled for justice, what gave her the confidence to keep asking even when she got turned down many times before?
3. As Christians, from where should our confidence come (Psalm 59:9), and how can we move from doubt to confidence?
4. Have you ever tried writing things for which you are grateful each night before going to bed? If yes, how did it help you become a positive person?
5. In Colossians 3:23-24, when the apostle Paul told the Colossians to work confidently because they are guaranteed an inheritance from the Lord, what was the inheritance he was referring to?

If you are doing the 5-week study, jump to video 4. You can do this section later.

Matthew 6:25-34

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? 28 “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? 31 “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Most successful people have learned how to temper worry. Shawn Achor says that “the belief that worrying will prevent bad things from happening is one of the greatest enemies of positive genius.” Christians should have no problem with that statement, as it so closely reflects this statement made by Jesus in His sermon on the mount. As we move from fear to courage, from pessimism to optimism, from worry about tomorrow to trust in God, we WILL be more effective in our mission to make disciples and to spread the love of Christ.

Going Deeper

6. Do you see a connection between negativity/pessimism and fear/worry?
7. What does Paul mean when he says that God will give us everything we need? What needs is he referring to?
8. How can a person plan for the future without worrying about the future?

Chapter 4 (Video 5)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the fact that there are so many Christian denominations and theological divisions? Do you believe these divisions are harmful or helpful?
2. What issues/theologies, if any, are worth dividing churches over?
3. Can a church be effective if its members do not agree on multiple theologies?
4. How do you think disunity inside the church affects the church's ability to accomplish its mission?

If you are doing the 5-week study, jump to video 6. You can do this section later.

I Corinthians 3:1-23

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

I Corinthians 3 is perhaps the best description of Biblical unity. It begins with a rebuke of Christians who divided themselves rather than serving God as a united body. We are co-workers in God's service. We are on the same team, and the body of Christ must not be divided. Why are we so tempted to divide the body of Christ by choosing to follow men? John Calvin and John Wesley were great leaders, but they were servants of Christ. Division based on opinions of their teachings reveals spiritual immaturity. In I Corinthians 3:16, Paul describes the church as something that cannot be divided without breaking it, a temple. Division based on the teachings of men and secondary Christian theologies has become a common habit of the church, and it does so under the guise of creating a more perfect union.

Going Deeper

5. Can you tell any stories of division within the church? How has it affected you personally?
6. Why do you think the apostle Paul spent so much time encouraging members of the church to settle their differences and pursue unity?
7. If "the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile," how do we keep from looking to the wisdom of men to determine our priorities and look to the wisdom of God?

Chapter 5 (Video 6)

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the effects of negative theology? Do you think there are any involuntary responses to those beliefs?
2. Why do you think God told John not to write down the revelation that he saw in Revelation 10? In what areas of our lives should we learn to have restraint?
3. Have you read the Left Behind books? What do you think of them?
4. Why are people drawn to apocalyptic predictions?

If you are doing the 5-week study with a group end here for the week, you can do this section later.

Matthew 24:42-44

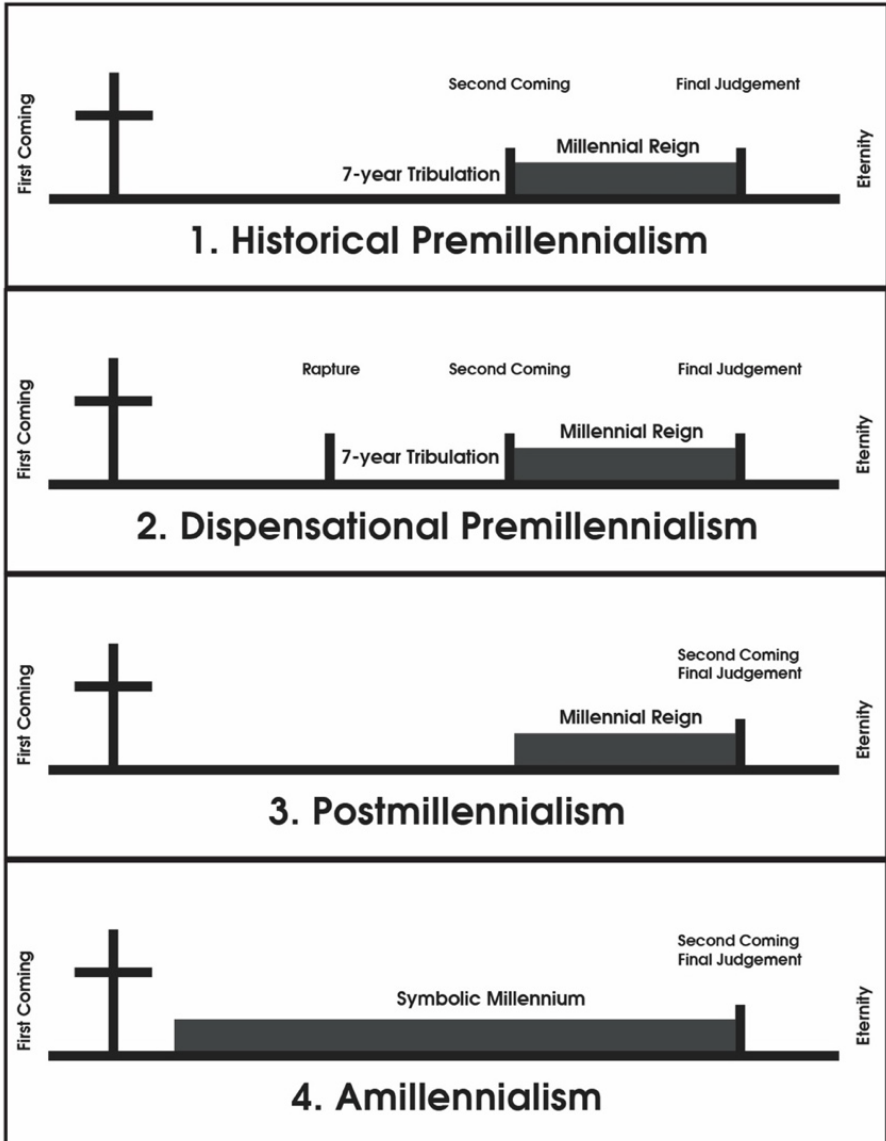
42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

One benefit of a focus on eschatology is the urgency that it produces. Urgency is not only necessary; it is an obvious response to the gospel. We must stay focused on the short time that we have on this earth to lead people to Christ, but that does not mean that investing in long-game strategies is a waste of time. We must not allow urgency to make us focus our efforts on those people who can be most easily and quickly led to Christ and neglect those people who will only be won after we invest in them for a lifetime.

Going Deeper

5. If no one can know when Christ will return to Earth, why are people tempted to predict the date of His return?
6. In your experience, are Christians overly complacent, or are they in too much of a hurry to lead people to Christ? What are some things Christians can do to remind ourselves the urgency of our mission?
7. How would you describe a healthy balance between urgency and preparation for the distant future?

Chapter 6 (Video 7)



Discussion Questions

1. Have you decided which of the eschatological theory is most accurate? Why or why not?
2. Do you think there is value in talking about what will happen before, during, and after the second coming of Christ?
3. Why do you think the Bible doesn't clearly explain what will happen before, during, and after Jesus returns?

4. 2 Timothy 3:1-9 talks about terrible times in the last days. Do you think that is a description of what the world was like in the past, what the world is like now, what the world will be like in the future, or all of the above?

If you are doing the 5-week study, jump to video 8. You can do this section later.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The church in Thessalonica grew even though they experienced persecution, and their perseverance and faith gave others courage. This passage tells us that when Jesus returns he will judge all people. Some will be separated from God forever (Hell), and some will receive grace (Heaven). Dispensationalism requires a period of seven years between the rapture and the second coming of Christ, then one-thousand years between the second coming and the judgement. This passage seems to say that the judgement will happen at the same time as the second coming. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:35-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and 2 Peter 3:3-15.)

Going Deeper

5. Spend a few moments remembering what is at stake in the judgement. What allows a person to be found innocent when God comes to judge the world?
6. Remembering that most people believe there will be a seven year period between the rapture and the return of Christ, and a 1000 year period between the return of Christ and the judgement, do you think people will have an opportunity after the rapture or after Christ's second coming to give their lives to Him?

Chapter 7 (Video 8)

Discussion Questions

1. Is it good that we have moved from building cathedrals and impressive stone buildings to converting warehouse and storefronts into churches?
2. Reflecting on Matthew 16:18, do you think Christians have good reason to be optimistic about the future?
3. What changes do you think the church of the future will look like?
4. Is there a role that you can play in discipling/leading the next generations?

If you are doing the 5-week study with a group end here for the week, you can do this section later.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NLT)

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names.

Not only does this passage show the last days began when Jesus was born, it also shows that God holds these days in His hands. God has worked throughout history in various ways through various people to accomplish His plan, and He has spoken to people in multiple ways throughout history. He walked with Adam and Eve, but their sin created a barrier between God and man. He spoke to the Hebrew people through fire and through prophets. He then came to Earth to teach in person, and through His death and resurrection, He broke the sin barrier. Now the Holy Spirit can speak to each of His children. Moses would have amazed by a world in which God would make a way for all of His children to communicate with God daily. The way God will work in the future may not look like it did in the past, but He does have a plan. The tribe of Issachar was a tribe of scholars who were able to see how God was working in the world, and their recognition of the signs of the times helped them to show the people of Israel the course to take (1 Chr. 12:32).

Going Deeper

5. Why are Christians tempted to believe that God will do the same things in the future that He did in the past? What are some new things (Isaiah 43:19) that God is doing in the world today?
6. If God "sustains everything," how much control do you think He has?
7. In what ways does God speak to people today, and what does that tell us about our place in God's plan?

Chapter 8 (Video 9)

Discussion Questions

1. How do we keep from waging a culture war on the lost people we are called to lead to Christ? How do we look past their sinful behavior to see the depraved person in need of a spiritual doctor?
2. What is the difference between knowledge & wisdom? What is the danger of having so much knowledge without the wisdom & experience to understand how to apply that knowledge in constructive ways?
3. Can you think of ways Christians can step into the mentoring role Gen Z is so desperate for? Is this an appropriate role for church to play?
4. For generations, churches have fought younger generations over music, secondary theologies, traditions, apparel, etc. Change is necessary for growth, and things that don't change die. What can the church do to make "change" a core value and avoid clinging to less unnecessary traditions?

If you are doing the 5-week study, jump to video 10. You can do this section later.

Acts 17:22-28 (NLT)

So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about. "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. "His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

When Paul told the religious leaders of Athens about God, he didn't condemn them for worshiping multiple gods. He didn't even talk about Israel, but he did describe God as the one who holds all things in His hands. He told them that God has a great plan for the world. He wants everyone to seek Him and find Him. Then, rather than quote Scripture, Paul quoted their poets, creating common ground and relevancy.

Going Deeper

5. Is the fact that God determined our "boundaries" and decided when we "rise and fall" a reason to optimistic or fearful about the future?
6. When Paul told the religious leaders of Athens about God, why did he choose to talk about God's sovereignty but not about sin? Why did he talk about their poets but not about the Bible?
7. What does finding common ground and being relevant look like in your culture? Are there issues that we can look past and cultural opportunities we can use to reach people who are far from God?

Chapter 9 (Video 10)

Discussion Questions

1. Take some time to talk about what it would have been like to have experienced the events of Pentecost in Acts 2.
2. As love becomes mature, it becomes sacrificial. Give a description of sacrificial love.
3. When Jesus told His disciples to pray “Thy Kingdom come,” what did He mean by that phrase? What does it mean for the Kingdom of God to “come?”
4. What is the most effective way that Christians can sacrificially bring people to Christ?

If you are doing the 5-week study with a group end here for the week, you can do this section later.

Acts 2:38-47

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This is a description of the early church that was virtually irresistible to the people who came in contact with it. The description includes baptism, teaching, fellowship, prayer, generosity, meeting together in homes, eating together, praising God, and numerical growth. The early church was made up of baptized Christians who met together to praise God and hear Biblical teaching. They met in homes to fellowship, eat, and pray. They were extravagantly generous, and God continually added to their numbers.

Going Deeper

5. How well does this description of the early church describe the local church in America today? In which area do we need the most improvement?
6. If you grew up in the church, which church looked more like the Acts 2 church, the church you were a part of when you were growing up or the church you are a part of now?
7. What made the early church so irresistible?

8. What role does God play, and what role do we play in leading people to Christ and growing His church?
9. If you could design a church, what would it look like? What would it do and not do? What would the leadership structure look like? How would people learn, serve, give, worship, pray, and fellowship?

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How Positivity Will Help Christians Flourish