

“LIFE’S TOO SHORT... TO BE NEGATIVE”

Numbers 13:27-14:4

INTRODUCTION

1. Do you know Colt McCoy’s story? He spent all 4 years of his collegiate football career preparing for the day he’d play in the National Championship game. In fact, much of his life was spent preparing for that moment just a couple of weeks ago.

But Colt McCoy was injured after just a half-dozen plays in the game and spent the rest of the game as an observer on the sidelines. If I would have been in his shoes, I’m not sure what I would have said. But that’s the way it is with life. It just seems like its one thing after another.

2. How many of you are country music fans? Well, I don’t listen to a lot of country music, but I’ve noticed that country music provides a pretty clear commentary on the way many people feel about life. It can even be a little depressing and pessimistic, right?

Here’s the word to a song:

Sarah’s old car’s about to fall apart
And the washer quit last week
We had to put momma in the nursing home
And the baby’s cutting teeth
I didn’t get much work this week
And I got bills to pay
I said I know this ain’t what you wanna hear
But it’s what I’m gonna say

(Chorus)

Sounds like life to me it ain’t no fantasy
It’s just a common case of everyday reality

3. If we’re not careful, that’s how we start to look at life. You see, our world is filled with negative news and negative people. The media is constantly reporting negative stuff. After listening to the news for awhile, you feel like saying, “*Boy, things are really bad.*” Without even realizing it, we are dragged into the sludge of negativity.

Have you ever been around somebody who always sees the cup of life as half empty? Do you live with somebody who looks at life that way? Do you go to school with somebody like that? Do you work with somebody like that? After awhile, you feel like saying, “*Can’t you see anything through a different lens?*”

4. Well, the Bible talks a lot about a negative attitude. God tells us in His Word that we’ve only got 5 or 6 decades to make a difference with our lives. Life is just too short to be negative! If you feel like you’ve been soiled by the negativity of others... if you feel like you’re being dragged into the swamp of a negative attitude... this morning is just for you. We want to turn our attention to a couple of principles from Scripture that will help us conquer the tendency toward negativity in all of us.

When I think about this subject, I’m reminded of a group of people who had a doctor’s degree in negativity. I’m talking about the Israelites.

The Bible says they were miraculously delivered from slavery in Egypt. God parted the waters of the Red Sea so they could cross on dry ground. He led them through the desert with a cloud by day and fire by night. He miraculously provided manna from heaven for them to eat.

And then, He gave them an incredible piece of real estate known as, The Promised Land.

Right before the Israelites were allowed to enter the Promised Land, God told Moses to send 12 spies into the land to check it out. But when those spies returned, the great majority had fallen into the trap of a negative attitude. We pick up the story in Numbers 13. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, why don’t you turn there with me? From this story, we’re going to glean these guidelines that will help us overcome the negativity that swirls around us in our world. First of all I want you to...

1. **CONSIDER THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE**

First, the Bible tells us that...

- Negativity tends to run in packs

Let’s pick up the story in verse 26:

“They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.

They gave Moses this account: ‘We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.

But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there” (Numbers 13:26-28).

Think of someone who is negative around your office, and I suspect their friends will be negative, too. Negativity breeds negativity.

Did you hear what these spies said?

“Can’t, Moses, the land is incredible. Fruit is huge. But the people are powerful and the cities are fortified.”

Have you noticed negativity just begs to be shared? That’s true for a couple of reasons. First, all of us tend to be a bit lazy. We get an email that has some negative information, we see something that happens or we hear a report, and we think, *“I can’t believe that. How could they do that? Why would they say that?”* We automatically assume that our impression is true rather than checking out the facts.

Isn’t it amazing how much negative people tend to hang out together? And if we let them, they’ll drag us right into the swamp of negativity, too. It’s one of the reasons why Paul said to the Philippians:

“Do everything without complaining or arguing”
(Philippians 2:14).

The Apostle Paul knew the danger of a negative, complaining or whining attitude. All of us can go there but the Bible warns against it. Negativity runs in packs. Furthermore,

- Negativity starts and stops with you and me

Have you paid attention to the news about all the viruses in our world recently? We’ve heard about the West Nile Virus, the Ebola Virus, SARS, H1N1 and AIDS.

Do you know there is something more contagious than any of those viruses? It spread among the Israelites like a wildfire. It’s the virus of negativity. And it starts and stops with you and me. We can spread it to others if we’re not careful.

Did you see verse 32?

“They spread among the Israelites a bad report”
(Numbers 13:32).

But the punch line comes in verse 33:

“...We seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes.”

Somebody said,

“The Evil One can take our mouths, and with negativity, make them sound like megaphones.”

Eg. I love this thought,

“It’s not the jaws of the alligators that get you; it’s the nibbling of the ducks.”

There is a lot of truth in that!

Now, I want to ask a question: *“What does negativity sound like?”* Let me give you some words, and I want you to repeat them after me...

pessimism...cynicism...sarcasm...secrets...gossip...

We sound like a bunch of snakes ...s...s...s...s...

Negativity is all about the words we use. We have control over what we say to others, whether we speak the words with our mouths or whether we write them in our

emails. But, life is just too short to be negative. There is one more characteristic of a negative attitude...

- Negativity is often directed at leaders

It’s amazing how a negative attitude can start with a few people and spread to a whole lot of people.

Let’s pick up the story in Chapter 14, verse 2:

“All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword?’

Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to each other, ‘We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt’” (Numbers 14:2-4).

The negative attitude of the Israelites started with the conversation the spies had with Moses. Pretty soon, the whole assembly was grumbling against their leaders, Moses and Aaron.

Do you understand whenever you lead, some people will grumble. If you’re a parent, you’re a leader. If you’re a manager, you’re a leader. If you’re a coach, a teacher or in a position of influence - you’re a leader. Grumbling, backbiting and negative attitudes happen.

Did you get what these people said?

“Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?”

They were saying, *“We’d rather be in slavery.”* That’s what negativity does to you. It leads to slavery. It becomes your

master. Pretty soon, you’ve got a negative attitude and you don’t even know it.

Eg. Somebody said these people were “*stuck in the moan zone.*” They had the spirit of “Eeyore,” before Eeyore was even invented. It’s the spirit that says, “*Oh, no, .things are just never going to be any good. We’re never going to be able to accomplish anything. I’ll never get anywhere...*” and on, and on, and on.

About this time, you might be saying, “*Well, Bob, tell me - is there any hope? I’m dealing with this negative person in my life.*” Or, maybe you’re saying, “*I’m dealing with negativity in my own life. Is there any hope for me?*”

I believe there is. The Bible says if I’m going to overcome the negativity all around me in this world, I must...

2. COMMIT TO THE CLEANUP OF THE NEGATIVE ATTITUDE.

There really is hope for all of us. We can become clean before God when it comes to our attitude. On your notes, I want you to follow with me through the word “*clean*” and discover five steps to having a positive attitude in life. First, I must. . .

- Connect with encouragers.

I love how Barnabas is described in the Book of Acts. He’s called a “*Son of Encouragement.*”

Eg. Do you understand there are three kinds of relationships you can have in life. The first is the one that will run your battery dry. It’s the kind of person who will just suck the energy right out of your life. I think the Evil One

plants people like that around us just to drain us of our energy.

And then, there are those who have a neutral influence on our lives. Neutral people give us a little bit of energy, but they also take away some. It’s kind of a level playing field.

But then, there are those relationships that are replenishing, recharging and recalibrating.

All of us need encouragers in our lives. The world would suck us into its swamp of negativity.

Paul just said it like this about Onesiphorus:

“*. . .he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains*” (Timothy 1:16b).

I’ve got to connect with encouragers. Then, I must take the next step which is to...

- Look to the past and the future.

If I’m going to overcome the negativity around me and in the world, I’ve got to look at the past and see what Jesus Christ has done for me. He died on the cross for my sin. He rose again. I can face this life because Jesus conquered death in the past. He experienced the very worst things that life can throw at us, and He won.

If that’s not enough, I could look to the future. You know what? I’ve read the last page of history, and guess what -- we win! That ought to cause every one of us who has a relationship with Jesus to be positive. If you don’t have that relationship with Him through faith in what He’s done, it’s no wonder life is dragging you down.

The writer of the Book of Revelations says in Revelation 21:4:

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

If I’m going to commit to cleaning up a negative attitude, I’ve got to connect with encouragers and look to the past and the future. And then I must. . .

- Enjoy what God has given you!

James says it like this in James 1:

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

Let me ask you a question: *“Do you enjoy what God has given you in life?”* Every thing we have is a gift from Him. People who are spiritually mature enjoy life.

Jesus said,

“I have come that they might have life and have to the fullest extent.”

Can you say, *“God, I thank You for the air I breathe. I thank You for being able to speak to others, to listen and to hear. I thank You for being a part of a church?”*

You show me somebody who is positive about life and I’ll show you somebody who is grateful. On the other hand, show me somebody who’s negative about life, and it’s somebody who is not grateful. That’s the way it was with the Israelites.

They had seen the deliverance of God from slavery. They’d seen the parting of an ocean; they’d seen a cloud in the sky and a GPS system at night. They’d seen water coming from a rock. You’d think they would be grateful. Not a chance!

Do you know the Bible says God gives us what He does in this life so we can enjoy it? Paul writes Timothy and says,

“God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (I Timothy 6:17b).

And then, if I’m going to overcome the negativity in the world around me, I must...

❖ Act in faith

The Bible says in Habakkuk,

“The righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

I’ve read it takes 10 positive statements to offset just one negative statement. I want you to think about that. Do you realize every time you say something critical... every time you have a negative comment... every time you’re cynical... every time you’re pessimistic... it takes 10 positive statements to offset that. Do you want that on your account before God?

You’ve heard the old statement, *“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never harm me?”* That’s not true. Words stick to us like Velcro. We should look for every opportunity to act in faith to demonstrate that faith before others.

There’s one more step in this process if we’re going to overcome the negativity around us. We must...

❖ Never forget the presence of God.

I believe one of the greatest statements in the Bible comes from Paul’s pen to the Romans. I want you to look at what he says:

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”
(Romans 8:31-32).

CONCLUSION

It’s so tempting to go negative, isn’t it? It’s so tempting to believe everything you read on the internet and to believe everything you hear. Do you know why? Because the Evil One is the father of lies.

He will do whatever He can to get us to have a negative view of life. But, it doesn’t have to be that way. By His grace and His mercy and His power, we can overcome all that’s happening in the world around us because life’s just too short to be negative.