

LESSON SIX: FACING THE FACTS

Pessimism and optimism are not fixed personality traits. Rather, behaviorists point out they are acquired traits that people use to explain to themselves why things happen to them. Since they are acquired traits, pessimists can learn to be optimists. Looking at life optimistically may be more important than people realize. Pessimists have poorer resistance levels to disease, weaker immune systems, are more susceptible to depression, and age physically faster than optimists. Some psychologists even believe that pessimism causes depression. It's in the Christian's best interest to be optimistic. After all, Christians are forgiven. They are loved. They will inherit eternal life. It doesn't get any better than that. Face the facts.

PRAY: Lord God, You have demonstrated Your uncommonly great love to us by sending Your Son, Jesus, into this world. Help us to seek Your face always so that we may live our lives in ways that reflect that love. Teach us, through Your Word, to be optimistic, because we are Your redeemed, restored, and forgiven children. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Sean took drugs and sold them to other kids. He befriended an elderly widow near his home, then stole her heirloom jewelry, pawned it and paid cash for a brand-new Porsche. As he'd done countless times before, Sean's dad intervened and fixed his son's problem.

One day at summer camp, Sean asked me if I'd go for a walk with him in the nearby woods. As we walked, he began to pour out his regret for his evil and perverse life. He asked if I'd pray with him. We found a large fallen tree and Sean climbed up, sitting cross-legged on the log. He prayed first, and I heard words of confession and remorse. This wayward and rebellious youngster cried out to God for grace and forgiveness.

I opened my eyes to see if this really was the same young man who hated everyone because they're all so stupid. Here's what I saw. Sean, the bad boy, was sitting in God's awesome presence with his hands and face turned upward. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "I'm sorry, God, for the terrible things I've done," Sean prayed. "Please forgive me and help me to be new."

—Robert Wolgemuth, He cheated on everything, *Men of Integrity*, July-August, 2000.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read Luke 11:1-13. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did one of Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them to pray?

Jesus had just returned from praying in a relatively secluded place. Since Jesus placed such a high priority on praying, no doubt His disciples concluded that it is a habit that they should imitate.

2. Why did Jesus tell us to pray to the Father?

Jesus addressed this prayer to His Father, because God is His Father and our Father as well. In this prayer He makes God accessible to us. (Please note that the Lord's Prayer is repeated here. It is first recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. Because Jesus repeated this prayer it takes on greater importance.)

3. Why is the Third Petition, "Thy will be done" omitted here?

The thought of God's will being done is embodied in the first two Petitions. As we pray for God's Kingdom, we pray for both the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory. God's will is done when the Kingdom of Grace is expanded as more and more people become part of His Kingdom.

4. How is our relationship with God contrasted with the relationship between the friends in the parable?

1. *God is much more than a friend to us.*
2. *The request was made at midnight and was easy to refuse. God does not refuse us.*
3. *The request was made for a stranger. We are not strangers to God.*
4. *The request was a small one. Our needs are much greater.*
5. *The refusal was selfish. God gives us everything He knows we need.*

5. Verses 9 & 10 are also repeated in Matthew 7:7 & 8. Why?

Jesus is demonstrating to us that we cannot pray too often. He does not want anything to discourage us from praying. He places no conditions on our prayers, and He excludes no one. Thus, the use of the word, everyone.

6. There is an obvious answer to the rhetorical question Jesus asks in verses 11 & 12. What is it?

The answer is NO. No father would ever give a son or a daughter something that would be harmful or even not helpful. Earthly fathers do not deceive their children in matters like these.

7. How did Jesus conclude His instruction for praying?

He used a logical argument that went from the smaller point to the greater point. If you conclude that earthly fathers take care of their children, then it follows that our Heavenly Father will do a superb job taking care of His children. He even promises to give the greatest gift of all, that is His Holy Spirit.

CHALLENGE: Discuss ways to set goals to increase your prayer life during the coming weeks that are both qualitative and quantifiable.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Jim Moore is senior minister at a church in Houston, Texas. A friend told him the following story. The friend, a sales manager, was driving his new boss around town when they happened to pass near the friend's home. The friend asked his boss if he would like to stop by his house and meet his family. His wife was baking an apple pie, and his children would be coming in from school. He asked his boss if he wanted to meet them.

"Let's get one thing straight right now," the manager replied. "I'm not interested in your family. I'm not interested in your wife or your children. I'm not interested in you personally at all or any of the circumstances of your life. All I'm interested in are results. All I'm interested in about you is your sales record!"

The friend told Moore: "That really hurt. I felt as though someone had slapped me across the face, but you know, I realized something. I realized that God is the opposite of that...He is interested in all of the circumstances of my life."

—James W. Moore, *Christmas Gifts That Always Fit* (Nashville: Dimensions for the Living, 1996), 64-65.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord God, thank You for being our Father. You demonstrated Your love to us by sending Jesus into this world. Help us to seek Your face every day of our lives. Remind us to pray to You always, because You know most of all what we need. In Jesus' Name. Amen.