



"There may be those on earth who dress better or eat better, but those who enjoy the peace of God sleep better."

—L. Thomas Holdcroft

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## Reasons for Optimism

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Are you generally up or down? Is your glass half-full or half-empty? Do you believe "all things work together for good" ([Romans 8:28](#)) or "all is vanity and grasping for the wind" ([Ecclesiastes 2:17](#))?

Attitude is an important factor in our Christian lives. The frame of mind from which we approach situations is a major dynamic in how we react to them. Our attitude could easily mean the difference between solving a problem and making it worse, and this has obvious ramifications to our growth in the [image of God](#).

Man's natural state seems to lean toward pessimism. This springs from the fact that human nature and the flesh that clothes us are never satisfied; they always want more. Solomon notes, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" ([Ecclesiastes 1:8](#)). Our desire for more of even good things is like an addiction to drugs or alcohol. An addict will use a small amount at first, but soon, he needs more to give him the same feeling of euphoria or mellowness because the body and brain compensate to manage it. Before long, he is taking far greater amounts of the drug, and ultimately, the dose is lethal.

Because we are never truly satisfied, then, we tend to think that our best days are behind us and things can only get worse. Notice that, in literature, the Golden Age is almost always in the remote past, and though the author may express [hope](#) for the future, a lingering feeling of nostalgia remains for a time that can never be recovered. Even among Americans, known worldwide as a most optimistic people, many recall some era of our past as the "glory days" or "happy days." Some yearn to turn the country back to the principles generally followed by the nation's founders because they are what made America truly great, and this yearning is fed by dissatisfaction with present-day America and little hope for a more-principled tomorrow.

If one dwells on his dissatisfaction long and deeply enough, he will not only be pessimistic, he will soon become downright bitter. The author of Hebrews tells us that this was among Esau's problems. He allowed a root of bitterness, a constant gnawing of dissatisfaction, an empty feeling of deserving

better, to drag him down ([Hebrews 12:15-17](#)). He reached a point where his bitterness was so much a part of his nature that he could not change for the better.

The story of Job instructs us more positively. We could call Job the "anti-Esau." [God](#) allowed [Satan](#) to take everything of value from him short of his own life: his children, his wealth, his health. Even his wife told him, "Curse God and die!" ([Job 2:9](#)). To make matters worse, his three friends—supposedly there to encourage him—sat around and lectured him on how he must be some kind of sinner to have attracted such stupendous curses on himself!

Sure, Job was depressed. Who would not be? He says, "May the day perish on which I was born. . . . Why did I not die at birth?" ([Job 3:3](#), 11). Yet, as we progress through the story, we find that Job is not really a pessimistic man. Though he loathes what has happened to him, he maintains his integrity with feisty arguments and a keen desire to know why God has dealt with him in this way. As soon as God reveals His sovereignty to Job, the man humbly submits to it and repents ([Job 42:1-6](#)). Unlike Esau, Job does not let his sorry state drag him down. Instead, he optimistically chooses to do something positive to change his situation for the better.

The epilogue to the story reveals a lesson we can take from this: "Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" ([Job 42:12](#)). Job's "golden age" is before him, not behind, and the key to his optimism is his relationship with God. Because he knows that God is in control of events—from the spinning of the cosmos to the smallest detail of his life—things would only turn out for the best. [Jesus](#) certainly echoes this in [Luke 12:32-33](#): "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

So, are you optimistic or pessimistic? If we are confident that God is with us—and He tells us positively that He is not only with us but *in us* ([John 14:20](#); [15:4](#); [17:21](#))—our glass should not be half-full but brim-full and running over!

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [The Unleavened Life Is a Happy Life!](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh observes that some misguided individuals have denigrated the practice of putting out leaven as childish and something to be outgrown. The fruits of their lives indicate that they never learned the subtle lessons these customs or practices were supposed to teach. The annual rehearsal of these practices is analogous to a musician or athlete who must faithfully practice or lose his skill. The Days of Unleavened Bread define our responsibility in God's plan to purge out habits, attitudes, and teachings that do not conform to God's way. Paradoxically, as it must seem to our human nature, God's way of self-mastery, self-discipline or self-control (purging those unwholesome things we think we cannot live without) actually leads to greater zest and joy than from following our carnal impulses.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

**[Enter the Joy of Your Lord!](#)**

by Staff

Happiness — everybody wants it, many pursue it, but who enjoys it for any length of time? We listen with disbelief when someone claims to know the way to lasting happiness now, in this life. Is lasting happiness achievable today? Or must we wait until the resurrection at Christ's return?

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