

**Jan 20**

## **Negativity**

Mark 6:1-6

Today we talk about one of the major stealers of joy. It is something we all have to work on. It is negativity. In many ways we human beings are very similar. We all want to be somebody. We don't all want to be the CEO of a company or a movie star but we all want to matter to someone. We all need to love and to be loved. We all need to find something to do with our lives that gives us a sense of meaning and purpose.

There are also ways we are very different from one another. When it comes to living with joy, we are very different. I have known people who had every right to be depressed and bitter and yet are full of joy. I have also known people who have everything and they are miserable and find some reason to complain constantly. It seems as if they look for the worst in every situation. They find it if they can and imagine it if they cannot. Two people can have the same blessings and one is thankful while the other is worried. Two can be in the same negative situation and one focuses on blessings and the other is fixated on problems. *Why? Because it is not just what you think that matters. It is how you think.* Some of us tend to think in positive terms and others see the glass as half empty. Life has taught me that positive is better than negative.

Being positive doesn't mean ignoring reality. It doesn't mean pretending that everyone's really good on the inside. You can be a realist and still be positive. Being positive means that we look for the good in every situation, believe that even our worst days come bearing gifts, and trust that God can bring a blessing out of every negative and hurtful situation we face. The bottom line is that joy is not determined by what has or has not happened in our lives. Joyful people refuse to let negativity fill their minds or rule over their spirits.

Where does all this negativity come from? It can come from the people in our lives. If we were surrounded by negative people growing up, it can still cause us to view life in that way. Even now, bad company corrupts good character. If the people around you are negative, always looking for a reason to complain, you will find it a real battle to remain positive. Negativity can also come from the events in life that wound us. We

don't have to give in to their power, but hurtful, negative events, often lead to a pessimistic attitude and a sense of hopelessness. If we are hurt enough it becomes normal and we expect all of life to continue to hurt us. Also growing up in a dysfunctional family can create a tendency for negativity for life. You learn to protect yourself from an environment where disappointment and hurt reign supreme. Rob Renfroe, whose book is the basis of this sermon series, mentioned one more source of negativity. I had to think about this one for a bit. Sometimes, he said, we learn too much from our previous negative experiences. When we learn from them that we shouldn't dream, shouldn't take risks, shouldn't believe that the future can be better than the present because we have been taught that life is unfair, unjust and hurtful, then we have learned too much. Sometimes we have to forget the past to embrace the future! Whatever the cause, think negatively long enough and over time that will not just be the way you think. It will be who you become. You will live without joy.

Here are some of the ways negativity steals our joys. Negativity turns our opportunities into obstacles. The difference between an obstacle and an opportunity is our attitude. We choose how to see our situation.

Negativity limits our potential. Who's right? The person who says I can or the person who says I can't? It is a trick question. They both are. Believe you can't and you won't. The most successful people are not necessarily the smartest, the best educated or the most gifted. They are often ordinary people with the extraordinary belief that they can learn what they need to succeed. Pessimists see all the problems, all the things that might go wrong. The limits you put on yourself block you from ever achieving some things. Even if you fail, the attempt was worth it.

Negativity hinders what God can do in our lives. We were made to have God do things in and through us. Negativity limits that work and robs us of the joy that comes only when God is moving powerfully in our lives. The story is often recounted of Mother Teresa that, when she was a young nun, told her superiors that she had a dream of building an orphanage for God. When they asked her what resources she possessed, she told them she had three pennies. When they chided her saying that she could not

build an orphanage with three pennies, she responded, "Oh, I know that. But with God and three pennies, I can do anything,"

Negativity repels positive people and attracts negative people. People who carry garbage around are always looking for a place to unload it. And when they find a dump that will receive it, that is where they drop it off. Think negative, talk negative and be only too happy to listen to what other negative people have to say and you will draw grumbling, complaining people to you. What you will not attract are eagles who can help you soar.

Negativity will ruin your witness for Jesus. People come to church because they want to make some kind of positive change in their lives. Complain constantly, find fault with others and it will destroy your opportunity to help people who want to change their lives for the better. A woman wrote about how she went to teacher conferences. She finished her time with the teacher and just as she was getting ready to leave the teacher took a big sigh. When she asked, "what is the matter?" The teacher said, "I just have to get ready for \_\_\_\_'s mom. She is critical about everything. Nothing we do is good enough for her." As this woman left the room she met the mom in question and was shocked to know her. She was an active member of their church. How could they attract families if one of their own was known as being so negative? Think about all the interactions you have. Negativity will ruin your chance to witness because people want to make positive changes not see the world as dark and gloomy.

So, how can we become more positive? First, accept responsibility for your attitude. It is not what happens to you but what happens inside you that makes the difference. Nobody can make you happy but you. And nobody can choose your attitude but you. Each and every day you have a choice to make. The choice is how you are going to approach today. Choose to look for the positive, be up and you will find joy. Let the negatives of life weigh you down and you will be depressed.

I think of a woman who dealt with severe arthritis. She was in constant pain yet she was one of the most upbeat people I have known. Her secret was that she decided each day to make a conscious effort to look at the good in life. The pain and disability

was always there. She did not have to focus on it; she just had to deal with it. But joy, that was what she focused on and, by claiming that attitude, her life was filled with joy.

Second, look for the good around you. Negative people concentrate on what they don't have. Positive people are grateful for what they do have. If we are not experiencing blessings, it is not because God hasn't given them to us. It is because there is a problem on our end. We are not seeing them or celebrating them. We expect life, at times, to make us happy. God blesses us even in difficult times and, if we focus on this we will find, like the Apostle Paul, that we can be content, maybe even joyful in all situations.

Inventory your influences. What is influencing your attitude? I am not telling you what to read or watch or whom to associate with. But it is wise to take inventory of what you are inviting into your heart and mind. Too much negativity and it will get you. In the scripture today it says that Jesus could do no miracles in Nazareth because of the people's attitudes. All they could see was Joseph's son. They had seen him grow up and taught him in the synagogue. Now he was a teacher with disciples and they could not listen. Their past influenced their attitude today. And, because of their lack of belief, Jesus was limited. When we let negativity and other types of limited thinking influence us we limit what God can do for us.

Finally, we need to take control of our tongue. I want you to do something. Smile for ten seconds. Smile again and take a deep breath and hold it. Feel better. It is hard to smile and feel bad. Think about what you say, own it and keep it positive. When we let criticism, cutting remarks, put downs, woe is me, and I am a victim talk overflow from us we cannot be positive. Take control of your tongue and share good news, be supportive, and try to bring a smile to others while smiling yourself and it will make a difference.

We all swirl down into negativity at times. Life is hard, people are unfair and unkind. However, we have a choice as to what we do. Remember, the bottom line is that joy is not determined by what has or has not happened in our lives. Joyful people refuse to let negativity fill their minds or rule over their spirits. May you invite God anew into your life as you conquer negativity and fill your life with joy.