

Optimism, Entry #1 of 3

Being spiritually awake, we can see the miracles that surround us, even when life is difficult (*Living Clean*, Chapter Seven, "Awakenings").

Optimism is one of those spiritual principles that, perhaps too simplistically, gets merged with a personality trait. It's true that some of us easily see the positive side of things, because that's who we are. But more of us are wired differently. For those of us who aren't born optimists, we can use optimism as a strategy to shift our perspective. It takes effort—sometimes enormous effort—to open our eyes to see life's bounty and beauty during dark times.

"To me," a member wrote, "optimism means that even if I don't see a light at the end of the tunnel, I can keep checking to see if one appears. And the 'miracle' is that it eventually does, even if it's tiny." Because we risk rejection and disappointment by doing so, it takes courage to keep peering into that darkness.

Optimism can sometimes be found when we take a moment to look outside of our own woes. "When I can't discern the good in my own life," wrote another, "I look at someone else's. I see the road they've traveled and their transformation against all odds. Sometimes it takes one breath to shift my perspective, other times I need a crowbar." When we look only at ourselves, we're self-obsessed—obsessed with what was taken away from us or what we never had.

Some of us find our optimism strategy in the simple benefit of the gratitude list. Or it's allowing others to care for us in our time of need, rather than driving them away with our indulgence in "I got this" or "poor, poor me." Or it's prayer, an expression of trust in our Higher Power. Optimism alone can't save us from utter despair or self-destruction. We need perseverance, hope, and lots of gratitude. One addict put it like this: "The only way to have what I want is to want what I have."

*I'm relieved I don't have to be an optimist to practice this principle.
I will make every effort to see the miracles around me, or at least I
can commit to finding strategies that help me to keep looking.*

Optimism, Entry #2 of 3

When we realize we've survived every emotion we ever had, we start to believe that we are going to be alright even when we don't feel alright (*Living Clean*, Chapter Seven, "Living Our Principles").

Feelings get a bad rap, so it's no wonder that many of us tried to avoid them. At best, they seemed complicated and uncomfortable. At worst, they posed a threat to us since appearing vulnerable might be dangerous. By the time we find recovery, we may be accustomed to being shut down emotionally. Our hardened exteriors were an asset in active addiction, protecting us like armor. But, like so many of those old survival skills, we found that being emotionally unavailable hindered our recovery. We needed a different approach.

Having little to no experience with emotional wellbeing, many of us tried to select which feelings we would feel. Unsurprisingly, we welcomed feelings that brought us pleasure: love, connection, joy, satisfaction—bring it on! On the other end of the spectrum, we did our best to stuff or avoid anger, heartache, or dread. Sadly, we recognized that this familiar pattern of seeking pleasure and avoiding reality—retooled without the cushion of dope—was not an effective path to emotional health.

Try as we might to avoid it, we all face adversity eventually and the emotions that accompany it flood in. When we first experience despair without drugs, we may feel like we're going to die. "Everything is horrible!!" we tell our sponsor dramatically. Though we'd been fishing for a co-signer, we settle for some empathy. We're offered assurances that our troubles are neither inescapable nor permanent.

"I think of my feelings as works-in-progress," our sponsor explains. "I won't deny my emotional response these days because I know it's just a first draft, not ready to be framed and hung on a wall. My feelings can evolve with some time and distance, just as I do. The hope I found in NA gave me the courage to test out this theory. My optimism is rooted in experience. I have faith that better times will come."

I will approach my emotional life with optimism today. My feelings—good or bad—are only temporary and subject to revision.

Optimism, Entry #3 of 3

Just for today my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs (Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program).

People often talk about pessimism and optimism in terms of seeing the glass as being “half-empty” or “half-full.” As addicts, many of us think about it more in terms like, “What’s in the glass, though? Is it any good? When can I get more?” or “Do you have more than I do? Let me have some of yours.” No matter how many glasses we have or how full they are, we addicts tend to always be concerned with where the next one is coming from and/or what the people around us have in theirs. We often forget that, before recovery, we either didn't have a glass at all or couldn't keep one, full or not.

The shift in our thinking called for in our Just for Today reading is revolutionary for us. Instead of focusing on what's next or what's going on around us, we are called to focus on ourselves, right here and right now. The principles of optimism and hope often seem to be forward-looking, directing our attention to what is yet to come. However, as anyone who has ever been assigned to do a gratitude list can tell you, focusing on what is going well for us in the present moment can dramatically change our outlook on our lives.

When we focus on our recovery, on living and enjoying life without the use of drugs, our fears and anxieties tend to melt away. We become less concerned with matters like when our glass is going to get refilled. If we look into the glasses of those around us, it's to see whether we can share what we have with them. Focusing on our glass—our recovery—gives us optimism by reminding us that we will be okay, no matter what.

Being in recovery means I no longer have to wonder whether the glass is half empty or half full. Not only do I have what I need, I have enough to share. I no longer need to compare with others.