



# Is Optimism a Brain Disorder?

PRESENTED TO:  
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## Scripture

- ▶ It is written: **“I believed; therefore, I have spoken.”** (Quote from Psalm 116:10a)
- ▶ With that same **spirit of faith**,
  - we also believe, and therefore, we speak because (2 Corinthians 4:13)
  - we know that the **one** who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead
    - will also raise us with Jesus and
    - present **us** with **you** in his presence. (2 Corinthians 4:14)

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## Scripture

- ▶ All this [Paul's trials and troubles] is for **your benefit** ...
  - so that the **grace** that is reaching more and more people
  - may cause **thanksgiving** to overflow to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:15)
- ▶ Therefore, we do not **lose heart**.
- ▶ Though **outwardly** we are wasting away, yet **inwardly** we are being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

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## Scripture

- ▶ For our light and momentary **troubles** are achieving for us an **eternal glory** that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:17)
- ▶ So, we **fix** our eyes not on what is seen but on what is **unseen**. (2 Corinthians 4:18a)
- ▶ For what is **seen** is temporary, but what is **unseen** is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18b)

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# Introduction

## Point One

The **Apostle Paul** writes to the Corinthian church and says something rather puzzling:

*We do not lose heart.* (2 Cor 4:1)

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# Introduction

## Point Two

This is puzzling because of the **context**.

Paul had been experiencing all kinds of trouble, difficulties, and setbacks.

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# Introduction

## Point Three

As he says,

*We are hard-pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed.*  
(2 Cor 4:8–9)

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# Introduction

## Point Four

So then, ...

Was the **Apostle Paul** an **irrational optimist**, or did he have some **rational reason** to have **hope**?

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## What is an Optimist?

Was the Apostle Paul an irrational optimist, or did he have some other reason to have hope?

1. An **optimist** is a person who has a positive outlook on life and tends to **believe** that good things will happen.
2. They have a **hopeful attitude** and choose to **focus** on the good in people and situations.
3. Even when faced with challenges or setbacks, an optimist looks for the **silver lining** and **believes** things will work out for the best.
4. They are also **kind** and **compassionate** towards others, **believing** that positivity and kindness can make a difference in the world.

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## Qualities of an Optimist

Was the Apostle Paul an irrational optimist, or did he have some other reason to have hope?

1. **Positive mindset:** Optimists have a **positive outlook** on life and focus on the good rather than the bad.
2. **Resilience:** The ability to **bounce back** from setbacks and failures is not just a trait; it's a **strength** that optimists possess, offering a beacon of hope and encouragement to all.
3. **Self-belief:** They have **confidence** in their abilities and **believe** they can achieve their **goals**.
4. **Proactivity:** Optimists **take action** to make things happen and **take advantage** of opportunities to come to them.
5. **Flexibility:** They are **adaptable** and open to change, seeing it as an opportunity for growth.
6. **Kindness:** Optimists who believe in the **transformative power** of positivity and kindness **inspire** a sense of compassion and empathy, fostering a world where small acts of kindness can make a significant difference.

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## Weaknesses of an Optimist

Was the Apostle Paul an irrational optimist, or did he have some other reason to have hope?

1. **Overconfidence:** Sometimes, optimism can lead to overconfidence, causing individuals to **underestimate** the challenges they may face.
2. **Ignoring potential risks:** Optimists can sometimes **overlook** potential risks and downsides, leading to negative consequences if they do not take the time to assess and prepare for them adequately.
3. **Disappointment:** While optimists are generally positive, they can become **disappointed** if things do not go as planned, leading to **feelings** of frustration and discouragement or a crisis of faith.
4. **Unrealistic expectations:** Optimists can sometimes have unrealistic expectations, which can lead to disappointment and frustration when those expectations are not met.
5. **Lack of realism:** In some cases, optimists may have a tendency to **ignore** reality or **downplay** negative experiences, which can lead to a lack of awareness and understanding of the world around them.

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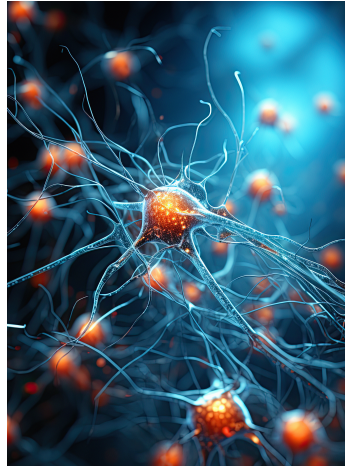
## Scientific Study

- ▶ In a study published in the October 2011 issue of Nature Neuroscience,
  - researchers at the **Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging at University College London** presented evidence
  - that naturally optimistic people learn only from information that reinforces that **rosy outlook**.
- ▶ In other words, **naturally optimistic people** tend to look only at information that supports their optimism and discount facts that don't.
- ▶ This basically says that many optimists are optimistic because they **don't** include or ignore all the **facts**.



## Neuroscience Research

- ▶ The **study** actually suggests that many of us are hardwired for **irrational optimism** as well.
- ▶ The study authors wrote,
  - “Our findings suggest that this human propensity toward **optimism** is facilitated by the brain’s failure to code errors in estimating pessimistic updates.”
- ▶ Some reporters have shorthanded this finding to describe **optimism** as a “**brain defect.**”
- ▶ So then, optimistic people are **crazy**, especially when the **facts** don’t support the optimism.



## Neuroscience Research

- ▶ Brain defect or not, **optimism** seems necessary for personal progress.
- ▶ We have to be able to **imagine** better realities.
- ▶ “**Without optimism,**” wrote Tali Sharot, one of the researchers,
  - “our ancestors might never have ventured far from their tribes and
  - we might all be cave dwellers, still huddled together and dreaming of light and heat.”



# Key Point

### The Research

- ▶ The point of the research is that **optimism** is not always a good thing.
- ▶ It can be and, in many cases, is **irrational** because we’re not properly looking at all the facts the way we should.
- ▶ However, **optimism** is not always bad because sometimes we need to **take risks** and not let fear always control us.

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# Hope

### The Research

- ▶ Optimism is often linked to **hope** and usually implies religious connotations.
- ▶ As Christians, our **hope** is in God, whom we believe through evidences has the **power** to carry out his promises.
- ▶ So, since we have **faith** in God, we also have **hope.**
- ▶ Because God loved us, we **love** others and make our **calling** and **election** sure.

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## Critical Essentials

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ As the Apostle Paul says,
  - when **everything** seems to fail us, and
  - all we see is but through a **“poor reflection,”**
  - Our **faith, hope, and love** become critical essentials for the basis of our **optimism**.
- ▶ In other words,
  - when we look for the **qualities** that come from life experiences,
  - these **three virtues** are the solid footing on which we stand—even if everything else seems like a blur.

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## Irrational Hope?

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ However, we must ask ourselves, when everything is going **crazy** in our lives and disappointments are everywhere, is it wrong or irrational to be **optimistic**?
- ▶ Is it wrong to focus on the **unseen** (inheritance) when everything **seen** (here and now) falls apart?
- ▶ Or was the **Apostle Paul** engaged in **wishful thinking** when he said,
  - “We know that if the **earthly tent** we live in is destroyed,
  - we have a **building from God**, an **eternal house** in heaven, **not** built by human hands.”? (2 Cor 5:1)

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## The End View

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ If we limit ourselves to the evidence of this existence,
  - where **right** seems to win only some of the time,
  - we can make a case for a **pessimistic outlook** and even hopelessness.
- ▶ This is not to say that **prayer** doesn't change things or that **God's promise** to care for us is unfounded.
- ▶ But it does say that our **real hope** is in the **unseen** and is waiting for us, and by **faith**, we accept it.
- ▶ As Jesus has promised,
  - “If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me** that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:3)

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## Optimism & Hope

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ For a Christian, **optimism** and **hope** are radically different attitudes.
- ▶ **Optimism** is the expectation that things will improve, such as the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, etc.
- ▶ **Hope** is the trust that **God** will fulfill His promises to us in a way that leads us to true **joy** and **peace**.
- ▶ The **optimist** speaks about concrete changes in the future.
- ▶ But a person of **hope** concentrates their **trust** in the integrity of the **one** who promises.

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## Firstfruits

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ So, when **hope** for a better future is combined with faith in **God's** goodness and integrity, it is not a **brain defect** or **irrational optimism**.
- ▶ Why? Because God is faithful and has the power to fulfill His **promises**.
- ▶ This is why the **resurrection** of Jesus is so important.
  - It was foretold in the Old Testament, and Jesus predicted it as well, and it happened.
- ▶ Jesus' resurrection is called "**Firstfruits**" because it is the **first** of many resurrections—including ours, which gives us rational **hope**.

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## Firstfruits of the Spirit

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ Not only is **Jesus's resurrection** the foundation for our **hope** in God but so is the **Holy Spirit**.
- ▶ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the **firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the **redemption** of our bodies.
- ▶ And if the **Spirit** of him who raised Jesus from the dead is **living in you**, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your **mortal bodies** through his **Spirit**, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)
- ▶ The **Spirit** himself testifies with **our spirit** that we are **God's children**. (Romans 8:16)

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## Firstfruits of the Spirit

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ In 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul says the same thing about the **Spirit** and our future hope.
- ▶ Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our **heavenly dwelling** . . . we groan and are burdened . . . so that what is **mortal** may be swallowed up by life. (2 Cor 5:2, 4)
- ▶ God has made us for this very purpose and has given us the **Spirit** as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor 5:5)

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## The Comforter

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ According to John 14:26, the **Holy Spirit** is our Comforter.
- ▶ Several of the translations of this passage refer to the **Holy Spirit** as our ...
  - Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, and one who stands-by.
- ▶ In other words,
  - the activity of the **Holy Spirit** in our lives, both individually and corporately,
  - is for our strengthening, encouragement, and comfort, which gives us **hope**. [See 1 Cor. 14:3]

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## The Comforter

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ The Bible also says,
  - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who (through the Spirit) **comforts** us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor 1:3–4)
- ▶ Interestingly enough, when Paul was going through a rough time in his ministry, he said,
  - But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us . . . (2 Cor 7:6).
- ▶ In other words, when God comforts us, we can, by God's grace, give **hope** to others.

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## The Comforter

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ This is why Paul says that, as well, through God's mercy, we have this ministry and do not **lose heart**. (2 Cor 4:1)
- ▶ So then, what encourages Paul and his associates not to **give up**?
- ▶ God's faithfulness, mercy, and comfort.
- ▶ We are **hard pressed** on every side but not crushed; **perplexed** but not in despair; **persecuted** but not abandoned; **struck down** but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:8–9)

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## God's Mercy

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ No, in all these things (**hardships**), we are more than **conquerors** through him who loved us. (Rom 8:37)
- ▶ This is why all of us with a **sincere faith** can say,
  - For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation,
  - will be able to **separate** us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

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## Our Hope

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ What gives us **hope** and **optimism** about the future is not **irrational thinking**.
- ▶ Neither is it due to some **brain defect**.
- ▶ Our **hope** is **fully established** in the faithfulness, power, and goodness of God.
- ▶ The resurrection of Christ, the activity of God's Holy Spirit, and the mercy and comfort we receive from God all prove this **reality** that our **faith** is rational.
- ▶ These **all** give us reason to have **hope** regardless of present circumstances.

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## Our Hope

Regarding the Apostle Paul. Was his optimism rational or irrational?

- ▶ Our **Christian hope** is validated by God's **faithfulness** to his promises and reinforced through people's **testimonies**.
- ▶ In other words, what **God** has done for others, he can do for you.
- ▶ So then, there is always **hope**, no matter what we're going through.
- ▶ As the writer of Hebrews tells us, do not throw away **your confidence**; it will be richly rewarded. (Heb 10:35)

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# Summary

- ▶ **Optimism** is important, but it needs to be grounded in **reality** and supported by **predictable outcomes**. Otherwise, it's just **wishful thinking**.
- ▶ **Optimism** for a Christian is not **wishful thinking** because the **one** who promises us a better future has **proven** his faithfulness and trustworthiness.
- ▶ Through **Jesus Christ's resurrection** and the ministry of God's Holy Spirit in us, we are **guaranteed** a future that includes the restoration of all things.

## Rational Hope

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# Final Word

- ▶ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Peter 1:3)
- ▶ In his **great mercy**, he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the **resurrection of Jesus Christ** from the dead and into an **inheritance** that can never perish, spoil, or fade — kept in **heaven** for you, who through **faith** are shielded by God's power until the coming of the **salvation** that is ready to be revealed in the **last time**. (1 Peter 1:4-5)

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# Final Word

- ▶ In this (**living hope**), you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, you may have had to **suffer** grief in all kinds of trials. (1 Peter 1:6)
- ▶ These have come so that your **faith** — of greater worth than **gold**, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be **proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory, and honor when **Jesus Christ** is revealed. (1 Peter 1:7)

## AMEN

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