

Being a Realist

- *There are many different ways people can view life and our perspective will determine both our attitude and the decisions we make.*
- *People can be pessimists, fatalists, escapists, optimists, idealists, or realists.*
- *Instead of each one of these being distinct categories, some can blend into one another and produce different shades of the same colour.*
- *A pessimist always tends to focus on the negative aspects of life – the cup is half empty.*
- *King Solomon is an example of a person who became a pessimist.*
- *King Solomon’s pessimism developed as a result of his many ungodly decisions and resulted in spiritual ruin for himself and for his kingdom.*
- *King Solomon, who was given great wisdom by God, acted very foolishly by marrying foreign wives who eventually turned his heart away from God to the point that this once great king even bowed his knee to lifeless idols and worshiped false gods.*
- *Ecclesiastes, which was written by King Solomon near the end of his life, reflects a man who had grown despondent having lived a life of self-indulgence and realizing it had amounted to nothing.*

Ecclesiastes 1:1–3 (NKJV)

¹The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

²“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

³What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?

- *Solomon begins Ecclesiastes by summarizing his life by saying, “life is empty and devoid of meaning and all the things that one does in his or her life and all the things one accomplishes have no purpose.”*
- *There is nothing that Solomon says that reflects any gratitude toward God for all His blessings and mercies.*
- *Solomon had been blinded to all the good things that God had bestowed upon him and in fact Solomon’s view of life is strongly pessimistic.*

Ecclesiastes 1:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

¹⁵What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

- *Solomon even begins to lean toward being a fatalist by stating that there is nothing one can do to make things better, “what is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.”*

1 Corinthians 15:32 (NKJV)

³²If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”

- *Apostle Paul gives an example of the attitude of a fatalist who believes there is no conscious existence after physical death by saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”*
- *The different between a pessimist and a fatalist is that the first focuses on the negative and unpleasant things of life while the second feels that there is nothing that one can do to make things better and therefore they tend toward inaction.*
- *Carl Sagan, a well-known astronomer and cosmologist, was a vocal atheist and a fatalist.*
- *How can I say that Carl Sagan was a fatalist since he accomplished many things in both the field of science and education?*
- *Carl Sagan, being an atheist, believing that he had no soul and that there was no after life, did nothing to prepare for his eternal destination, being a fatalist he believed that any actions he took would be of no consequence.*
- *Carl Sagan’s wife said this about her husband’s death, “When my husband died, because he was so famous and known for not being a believer, many people would come up to me – it still sometimes happens – and ask me if Carl changed at the end and converted to a belief in an afterlife. Carl faced his death with unflagging courage and never sought refuge in illusions. The tragedy was that we knew we would never see each other again. I don’t ever expect to be reunited with Carl.”*
- *Even though Solomon believed in God and an afterlife, at the end of his life, he had become a pessimist and even tended toward being a fatalist.*
- *What made Solomon’s failures doubly painful is that he began his reign with such promise, God revealing Himself to Solomon in such wonderful ways.*
- *Solomon was a young man, possibly as young as 19 or 20, when he became king of Israel. Israel was at the peak of her glory and power under King David.*

- *Even more wonderful for Solomon was he had been hand-picked by God Himself for that position and given many wonderful promises by God!*
- *There was Solomon with an entire life ahead of him filled with potential and adventure.*
- *Where did Solomon go wrong?*
- *Solomon became an optimist instead of a realist.*
- *The definition that we are using for an optimist is someone who focuses on the positive things, but ignores the warnings or potential dangers in front of him.*

Proverbs 22:3 (NKJV)

³A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished.

- *A prudent or wise person not only sees the opportunities that God has placed before him or her, but also takes note of the warnings that God has spoken so as not to fall into temptation or unnecessary suffering.*

1 Kings 9:1–7 (NKJV)

¹And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do,

²that the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon.

³And the LORD said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

⁴Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments,

⁵then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

⁶But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them,

⁷then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

- *Twice Solomon had a visitation from God where God spoke wonderful promises to him, “I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever.”*
- *However, there was a condition that Solomon needed to follow and a warning that he needed to heed, “Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments then I will...”*

1 Kings 11:1–6 (NKJV)

¹But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—

²from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.

³And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.

⁴For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

⁵For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

⁶Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.

- *This is a very sad commentary on the conclusion of Solomon’s life, “For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.”*
- *The kingdom that God had established under Solomon’s father, David, had the potential to grow even more glorious under King Solomon, but instead, at the end of Solomon’s life, he wasted the opportunities God had given him. Instead he had sown seeds for the destruction of all that he had built up during his reign, as civil wars, moral decay, and enemy attacks would mar Israel’s future.*
- *When Solomon began his reign he was a realist for He both recognized the goodness and faithfulness of God and also his need to keep his heart and life pure before God. This was a glorious time for both King Solomon and Israel.*
- *However, as time went on, he began to neglect the warnings that God had given him and he only focused on the glory of being the king of a great nation.*

- *As God continued to bless him and Israel, he became an optimist thinking that no matter whatever he chose to do, the outcome would always be good.*

Ecclesiastes 2:18–19 (NKJV)

¹⁸Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

¹⁹And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

- *As the bad fruit of his actions and choices became evident in both his dissatisfaction with life and the direction his kingdom was taking, he became depressed and very pessimistic about the future.*
- *Solomon realized that all that he had built up would suffer destruction, because many of his descendants were going to follow his wayward example, “Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.”*

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 (NKJV)

¹³Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.

¹⁴For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

- *Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes with the words, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all.”*
- *God provided the Book of Proverbs so we could benefit from the wisdom that He had given to Solomon in order for us to have wisdom.*
- *God provided Ecclesiastes so we see the outcome of those who continue to live lives of neglect and dissipation, so that we can have wisdom and be realists.*
- *The Bible is the most amazing book, because God gives us the honest and true perspective—unvarnished, so that we can be realists.*
- *The Bible does not gloss over the failures of God’s people and at the same time we can see God’s faithfulness even in the midst of the failures of men.*
- *One of the amazing things about the Old Testament, it clearly speaks about the good and the bad of Israel, unlike other ancient national autobiographical books which only will speak about their glories and victories and do not mention their defeats and failures.*

Luke 4:9–12 (NKJV)

⁹Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.

¹⁰For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,’

¹¹and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

¹²And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”

- *The devil was trying to get Jesus to act as an optimist, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.”*
- *However, Jesus was a realist, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”*
- *I believe if Jesus had jumped off the pinnacle of the temple He would have died because He would have sinned by tempting God.*
- *There are many examples both in the Bible and from Church history where Christians thought that because God had called them into ministry they would be immune to the negative consequences of their actions, with disastrous results.*
- *Another contrast between optimism and realism is that not everything we do for God is always easy or always works out the way we would expect or want, but it is always glorious.*

Hebrews 11:32–38 (NKJV)

³²And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

³³who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

³⁴quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

³⁵Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

³⁶Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

- *Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter of the Bible and one could even say it is contains the Faith Hall of Fame.*

- *It names Gideon, Barak, Samson, David and many others “who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.”*
- *However, the great exploits of faith don’t end there, but continue on with, “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”*
- *The ones who stayed faithful in the midst of suffering, great hardship, imprisonment and even martyrdom cannot be said to have had less faith than those that experience miraculous deliverances, because all are an example of overcoming faith.*
- *An optimist would only focus on the first part of the list of overcomers, the ones which experienced supernatural deliverance and avoid speaking about those that suffered for their faith not accepting deliverance so that they could be found faithful.*
- *A realist sees the context of the entire chapter.*
- *Sometimes when we walk with the Lord we experience supernatural deliverance from difficult circumstances, but other times He doesn’t deliver us from the circumstances, but delivers us through the circumstances as He walks with us through those difficult times.*
- *Abraham had to learn how to go from being an optimist to being a realist.*
- *When God first promised Abraham that He would bless him with a son through his wife Sarah, who was barren, he was 75 years old, he probably was expecting it to happen fairly soon since he and Sarah weren’t getting any younger.*
- *However as the years began to pass, he and Sarah became impatient and wanted to help God out by having Abraham take Hagar as a surrogate mother.*
- *Abraham, when he first received the promise that Sarah would have a son, he was optimistic it would happen soon, and when it didn’t it led to some bad decisions.*

- *What caused Abraham to stumble is that he had a false expectation that God would quickly give him a son but what he didn't realize is that it would be another 25 years before God's promise to Abraham would come to fruition.*
- *Abraham's journey from being an optimist to being a realist was really his journey to becoming a man of unshakeable faith who no longer looked to circumstances to determine if God was faithful.*
- *The reality of faith that Abraham learned to embrace was that God is always faithful and His ways and timing is always perfect.*

Romans 4:16–21 (NKJV)

¹⁶Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

¹⁷(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be."

¹⁹And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,

²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

- *Abraham became a realist for he believed "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did."*
- *The most realistic thing we can believe is that God is always with us and He is always faithful to His Word and to His children.*
- *Abraham was a realist because "contrary to hope, in hope believed" because "not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb" but he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*
- *Abraham was a realist because he considered God's promises more reliable than the circumstance he faced, but he no longer had a presupposed expectation when God would do it.*

Proverbs 13:12 (NKJV)

¹²Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

- *If hope is a certain expectation that provides us patience and endurance to wait until we receive the fulfillment of what we are hoping for, then why does it say, “hope deferred makes the heart sick.”*
- *When one presumptuously expects God to do something a certain way or by a certain time and it doesn’t happen it results in a sick heart or a heart that is filled with disappointment and despair.*
- *Christians who are optimistic and believe they will never experience hardship or adverse conditions or expect to be instantly healed and it doesn’t happen can become discouraged and confused.*
- *Being realistic is believing that God is faithful and He is with us and we can totally trust Him.*
- *When one is a realist, we can continue to hope in God no matter how long it takes for the breakthrough to come. We will not grow weary or discouraged, because our eyes are not on the circumstances, but on God’s faithfulness.*
- *Being an optimist is believing that everything will work out the way that we would want it to and in the time frame we want.*
- *When a Christian becomes severely disappointed because something they were optimistic would happen didn’t happen, they can think:*
 - *“I have some secret sin that is stopping God from working in my life,”*
 - *Or “I can’t trust God and His Word,”*
 - *Or “I just don’t know what to do” and then they fall into despair.*
- *Unbridled optimism even in the natural realm can lead to needless hardship. For example, in the business realm someone who makes a business decision based only on the most positive possible outcome, ignoring any negative possibilities, will be unprepared if things do not turn out as they expected.*
- *The three shades of negativity can be seen as pessimism, fatalism, and escapism while they are different they are not totally unrelated and can easily blend together.*
- *A pessimist always tends to focus on the negative aspects of life, a fatalist believes that their actions will not change the ultimate outcome which tends to lead them into inactivity, but the third shade of this is escapists where they are just looking to escape this life.*
- *When a Christian is an escapist it doesn’t mean he is heavenly minded. It means he wants to escape from his problems in this life.*

- *As Christians, we are to be heavenly minded because as realists we know that to be in Heaven with Jesus is going to be so awesomely wonderful that there is nothing in this life that can compare.*
- *However, as realists we know that while on this earth we can be used by God to be a witness to see people come to Christ and to encourage other Christians who are struggling and to grow in our relationship with Christ.*
- *Some people use the expression, “he is so heavenly minded that he is of no earthly good” but the reality is that those Christians who have had the greatest impact on this earth are those who have been longing to be with Jesus in Heaven.*
- *There are things that I can only do in this mortal body that I will never be able to do in Heaven:*
 - *I can share the gospel with those who are lost so that they can be saved,*
 - *I can strengthen fellow believers,*
 - *I can resist temptation and thus bring glory to God through my life,*
 - *I can develop godly character and store up eternal treasures in Heaven,*
 - *I can make sacrifices for my Saviour.*
 - *To be heavenly minded gives us the strength to endure hardship in this life and also motivates us because we see everything in this life in the light of eternity.*

Philippians 1:21–26 (NKJV)

²¹For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

²²But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

²⁴Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

²⁵And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

²⁶that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

- *Paul is a wonderful example of a realist.*
- *Paul’s purpose to live on the earth was to have Christ live through him and be a light to this dying world, but at the same time he was looking forward to being in Heaven with Jesus, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*
- *Paul never looked to Heaven as a way to escape the problems of this life. Only in Heaven would he experience complete and unbroken fellowship with Christ face to face, “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”*

- *However, Paul also wanted to continue his ministry in spite of the hardships because, “I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.”*
- *To be an escapist means we are living a defeated self-centered life, not interested in how God can use us to help others or bring glory to Christ.*
- *The side of the spectrum opposite pessimism is optimism and idealism.*
- *An optimist tends to focus on the upside and ignore the unpleasant things of this life and an idealist has an image of what the church and life should be like in a perfect world.*
- *An idealist imagines the Church to be a place where everyone loves one another and there is never conflict, misunderstanding, or hurt feelings, and where perfect unity reigns.*
- *However, what they have described is really a description of Heaven, but it is a goal we, as realists, need to strive to achieve daily in the Church while on this earth.*
- *The irony when dealing with an idealist is that when they become disappointed they can cause strife and division.*
- *Both an optimist and an idealist can become upset or discouraged when things don't turn out the way they would want or expect.*
- *God has called Christians to be realists which means we need to see life as it really is in the light of God's Word and what He can do to change people's lives and circumstances.*
- *An example of the difference between an idealist and a realist is when an idealist says his or her wedding vows they think they are describing what marriage will be like, while a realist realizes that is what they need to strive for no matter what sacrifices need to be made.*

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

- *This Scripture describes what a realist needs to be meditating upon – those things that are just, pure, lovely, good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.*

- *Being a realist does not mean we focus on the difficulties and problems of this life, but that we acknowledge them and realize we need to lift them up to God in prayer for His help and wisdom.*
- *Being a realist means the reality of God is so much a part of our lives that we can still meditate upon all the goodness of God and the things He has done for us and have a heart of thanksgiving in the midst of trials.*
- *Being a realist protects us from disappointments because the reality of God is what dominates our thoughts and lives.*
- *A realist is aware of the reality of God independent of what circumstances they may face, because God's faithfulness remains unchanging and we can always rely upon Him.*

2 Kings 6:13–23 (NKJV)

¹³So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." And it was told him, saying, "Surely he is in Dothan."

¹⁴Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

¹⁶So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

¹⁸So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

¹⁹Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

- *The king of Syria wanted to capture the prophet Elisha and so he sent a great army by night to surround the city where Elisha was staying.*
- *In morning when Elisha and his servant got up they found that an army was surrounding the city and Elisha's servant went from being an optimist to being a pessimist, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"*
- *The change from being an optimist to a pessimist can happen when they are confronted by very difficult and perplexing circumstances.*
- *Elisha's response on the surface may appear as if he were a deluded optimist, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with*

them” *but he was in fact a realist for his eyes were focused on the God of Israel.*

- *Then Elisha prayed for his distraught servant, “LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see” with the result that “Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*
- *Elisha faced the circumstance completely resting in God’s provision and trusting that God had the solution to each problem.*
- *Do you think Elisha himself saw the mountains filled with chariots of fire and God’s great army?*
- *Elisha was not looking for the chariots of fire because his eyes were on the King of Kings.*
- *Elisha’s faith in God had gone beyond the need to continually be propped up by seeing God manifest Himself in a miraculous way.*
- *Elisha was an example of a true realist because everything he saw was in the context of the reality and faithfulness of God.*