From Dave’s Laptop

Tuesday, July 24, 2012

In just about forty-eight hours from this moment, Dawn Howard-Davis, Pastor Neville and his son Nathan, and I should be touching down in Kingston, Jamaica (Chima Ebinama is coming the next morning). We expect to spend Friday working at an orphanage and then head into the hills on Saturday to the village of Belfield, where we’ll help with a senior high summer Bible camp for which Neville will be the Director.

Neville has promised that it will be HOT and strenuous, with reveille at 0530, taps at 2230 and little rest in between. Besides helping with various camp activities, Dawn, Chima and I will be assistant counselors in the dorms and will each teach a workshop every day.

On this Sunday morning, Neville and I will both be preaching in local churches. On next Sunday morning, we’ll worship in the church where Neville grew up, and he’ll be preaching again. We’re due to be home about supper time on August 6.

Please pray for travel, health, patience, stamina, wisdom, and transformation both for us and for the youth with whom we’ll be working. I’m not going to attempt a Laptop next week, because I doubt that there will be much possibility for getting that done.

While we’re gone, Sandra Gray will be our preacher here at CBF on July 29, and Ben Davis will be our preacher on August 5. Debbie McCustion-Kahl will be our pastor on call. I know each of them will appreciate your prayers, too!

Last Sunday’s sermon was *iMope*, with the topic being spiritual perspectives on depression. I want to add a little more to that discussion in this week’s Laptop.

I mentioned on Sunday that one of the frequent causes of depression is how we think about the events of our lives. What I’m about to try to explain is a bit complicated, but if I can explain it adequately, this can make a significant difference in your experience. The explanations that follow have to do with this diagram. We’ll focus on the inner two columns first, then the outer columns.

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**Christian Experience**  
- True Inner Change  
  - 2 Corinthians 5:17  
- Eternal  
  - Hebrews 9:12b  
- All of My Being  
  - John 10:10b  

**Hopeful Response**  
- to Positive Events  
- to Negative Events  

**INTERNAL**  

**EXTERNAL**  

**STABLE**  

**UNSTABLE**  

**GLOBAL**  

**SPECIFIC**  

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**Christian Experience**  
- Comes from God  
  - Romans 6:23  
- Always Growing  
  - Ephesians 4:15  
- THIS Person/Event  
  - James 2:14-17  

**Hopeless Response**  
- to Negative Events  
- to Positive Events  

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All of us try to explain the events of our lives by attributing them to causes—by making “causal attributions.”¹ Whether a person is Hope-ful or Hope-less is determined in large measure by the ways in which these attributions of meaning are made.

Both Hope and Hopelessness are at least partially the result of these largely unconscious calculations of probability. Some researchers have suggested that such Hope-related calculations of probability take place along three continua. These dimensions are (1) locus of causality (Is the cause of this event internal or external to me?); (2) stability (Is this situation likely or unlikely to change over time?); and (3), limits of the arena (Does this situation affect all of my life, or only some smaller part of it?).² Each of us tends to make these evaluations according to a fairly predictable pattern.

For example, when bad things happen to us, despairing/Hope-less persons tend to respond with the internal-stable-global style (the box at the bottom of the second column indicates that “Internal-Stable-Global” is a Hopeless or depressive way to understand negative events). A person with this style understands negative events to be caused by some personal failure (internal) which is characterological and not likely to change (stable), and that negatively affects life satisfaction in virtually every area (global).

Such a person sees her or his situation as being the painful result of an irremediable deficit in her or his personhood. Here’s how they might respond to having an accident of some sort: “Well, here I go again. I’m just a real klutz/idiot/failure (stable, internal negative attributions), and here’s another example of that. I can never do anything right (global).”

At the other end of the spectrum are those persons whose attributional style is external-unstable-specific (the box at the top of the third column indicates that “External-Unstable-Specific” is a Hopeful way to understand negative events). These persons tend to locate the origin of negative experiences outside of themselves (external), considering these experiences to be transient (unstable) and situation-specific, not destiny-determining (not global).

Thus Hope-ful persons view negative experiences as temporary setbacks that can be adequately managed, and they are not afraid to consider adventurous solutions to them. Here’s how that same accident could have been understood: “Wow. I’m going to have to be more careful and more observant. I could have noticed that wire across the floor if I’d been looking (external). I’m usually more careful than this (the quality of carelessness is unstable). Thankfully, I didn’t break anything (specific; even breaking a bone could be understood as specific, not global, in its effect)!”

On the other hand, when good things happen, Hope-less and Hope-ful persons again take opposite approaches. Hopeless persons understand positive events as external-unstable-specific, that is, as being related to chance, not character, unlikely to persist, and affecting only a tiny portion of their lives (the box at the bottom of the third column indicates that “External-Unstable-Specific” is a Hopeless way to understand positive events).

Let’s say that our Hopeless person gets a promotion at work: “Wow. That must be a stroke of unusual luck (external to me, not related to my work, qualifications or abilities). It won’t last, though (unstable). I’m sure I’ll mess this up like I do everything else (specific; the promotion wasn’t due to any durable positive character qualities in me).”

Hopeful persons, on the other hand, understand positive events as internal-stable-global, that is, as being related to their own activity and/or character, likely to persist, and affecting most dimensions of their lives (the box at the top of the second column shows that “Internal-Stable-Global” is a Hopeful way to respond to positive events). When promoted, our Hopeful person thinks, “Wow! That’s great! This shows that my hard work has paid off, and that my boss has noticed my diligence (my durable internal character qualities that made me a good choice). I’ll have to keep doing my best (as I always do) in order to continue to prove to the boss that I’m a capable, dependable employee (stable, global). In fact, I may be ready to manage the department in a couple of years!”

Can you sense the difference in these approaches? Most of us fall somewhere in the middle between these two extremes, and we can make progress in thinking about things more positively once we understand these four perspectives on the events of our lives.

Once you’ve kind of gotten your mind around the inner two columns, the Good News is that Christians are able to view our lives through these six lenses in even more positive ways. There’s a positive spiritual interpretation that can be put on all six of these characteristics, and that’s what the outer columns are trying to portray. Here’s an effort at explaining what I mean:

1. **INTERNAL**: God has, through Jesus, completely changed my character.
   
   Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
   
   The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

2. **EXTERNAL**: This transformation is all God’s doing, and isn’t dependent on my own strength or goodness.

   For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

3. **STABLE**: These God-made changes are guaranteed both for time and for eternity.

   [Jesus] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12).

4. **UNSTABLE**: Whatever my faults today, God continues to work in my life to make me more like Himself.

   Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

5. **GLOBAL**: God gives me an abundant, overflowing, rich, and satisfying quality of life that is not dependent on my circumstances.

   I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

6. **SPECIFIC**: God’s forgiveness and God’s empowerment allow me to be fully present in each experience and with each person.

   What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17).

May you be Hope-full today!

Dave