

the Encourager[®]

Hope for Those Who Hurt

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OUT OF THE RUT

Renewing Your Attitude

A PUBLICATION OF DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

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13840 Gleneagle Drive • Colorado Springs, CO 80921

Phone: 719 481-3528 • Fax: 719 481-4689

E-mail: info@OutreachOfHope.org • Internet: www.OutreachOfHope.org

President...*Dave Dravecky*

Vice President...*Jan Dravecky*

Editorial Director...*Kim Jones*

Editor...*Amanda Sorenson*

Designer...*Chuck Haas*

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In some articles, names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the people involved.



SUMMING IT
ALL UP, FRIENDS,
I'D SAY YOU'LL
DO BEST BY
FILLING YOUR
MINDS AND
MEDITATING
ON THINGS
TRUE, NOBLE,
REPUTABLE,
AUTHENTIC,
COMPELLING,
GRACIOUS—
THE BEST,
NOT THE
WORST;
THE BEAUTIFUL,
NOT THE UGLY;
THINGS TO
PRAISE,
NOT THINGS
TO CURSE.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8
(THE MESSAGE)

Dear Friends,

One bit of wisdom that has really inspired me is Chuck Swindoll's assessment of attitude:

The more I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life... We have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will react in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can change is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens and 90% how I react to it.


I don't want in any way to minimize or trivialize the deep, difficult ruts in which people who are suffering find themselves. There is no doubt that adversity and stress rob us of some (and at times many) of the good experiences and enjoyment in life. But the fact is, our attitude makes a huge difference in how we face life, especially when we are suffering.

If we are suffering, a bad attitude can take us even lower than we are. And who wants that? On the other hand, it is wonderful to experience the amazing quality that a good attitude brings in the midst of difficult circumstances. The approach we take is up to us. Will we charge right in and face what we have to face, or will we fight against what we cannot change and feel sorry for ourselves?

I've done both. I have been so consumed by pain and suffering that all I could think about was survival, not my attitude.

And now, on the other side of those difficult days, my desire is to be prepared so that when adversity comes again I can have a different attitude and deal with the challenges in a better way than I did before.

There's no magic formula for renewing our attitude. It takes work—sometimes hard work. But we *can* choose the attitude we will embrace each day, and that's the hope we want to share with you in this issue of *The Encourager*:



Dave

YIKES! MY ATTITUDE IS SHOWING!

When Suffering Exposes What We'd Rather Not See

Kelly had always struggled with a fearful attitude. Fear of failure, pain, rejection or anything unpleasant could quickly overwhelm her. But Kelly had found an effective weapon that kept a tight lid on her fear: she simply took control of everything and everyone in her world. She did not use control to limit or harm others; it was simply her way of keeping her world organized, efficient and free of fear.

Although Kelly was a fine-tuned control machine, her expertise was no match for the fears that arose when her husband was diagnosed with an aggressive, life-threatening cancer. After all, there was so much to fear, so much potential for failure, so much pain: her husband's taxing treatment regimen and unpleasant side-effects, the financial pinch of increasing expenses and a decreasing income, the emotional and physical demands of being her husband's caretaker while also being the mother of their two young children. It's not surprising that Kelly kicked her control mechanism into overdrive. "I would get up every morning at 6:00 and sometimes stay up until 2:00 a.m. just to stay on top of everything. I kept telling myself, 'If I can just hold out a little longer, I'll be okay.'"

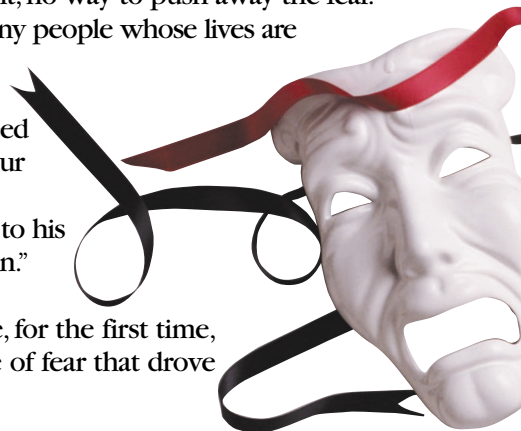
But Kelly wasn't okay. To her horror, deep depression caused her life to spiral further out of control. "During the day I felt like a black cloud was following me. If I dared to slow down, it would engulf me. So I didn't slow down or stop except to sleep." Even that didn't help. "I was unable to fall asleep at night and when I did sleep, it was only for four or five hours. I had heartburn and severe indigestion every day." Kelly's world was falling apart and she had no power to control it, no way to push away the fear.

Kelly's experience is common to many people whose lives are derailed by suffering. Affliction tears the pretty veneer off our faulty attitudes. Talk about bad timing! Just when we need to be at our best, the worst about us—our messed-up attitudes—is exposed. No wonder one cancer patient referred to his bad attitudes as causing him "double pain."

Desperate for help, Kelly made an appointment to see a counselor where, for the first time, she took an honest look at the attitude of fear that drove

CIRCUMSTANCES
DO NOT
MAKE YOU
WHAT YOU ARE,
THEY REVEAL
WHO YOU ARE.

JOHN MAXWELL,
POWER OF ATTITUDE



her need to control. She realized that although she believed in God with all of her heart, her frantic, fear-driven pace had caused her to give lip-service to her faith. "Becoming a Christian filled the terrible void I felt in my life, but I didn't address or change the way I lived my life, the way I handled pain, conflict or confrontation."

So Kelly began working on how she handled fear. Instead of compensating for her fears by controlling her environment, she bought a journal and put her thoughts and fears to pen. She began to study her Bible, to pray about her fears and over time made radical changes in her life. Kelly now says that dealing with her attitude of fear "caused me to grow in my faith, to pursue a deeper relationship with God. The blessings and joy that have come out of that pursuit have changed me and enriched my life."

Like Kelly, we may be unable to remove the disease or disaster that brings suffering into our lives, but we can choose to work on the faulty attitudes our suffering reveals. We can allow our suffering to be the catalyst for confronting attitudes that may have been crippling us for years, keeping us stuck in a rut we felt powerless to change.



OUR FINEST
MOMENTS
ARE MOST LIKELY
TO OCCUR
WHEN WE
ARE FEELING DEEPLY
UNCOMFORTABLE,
UNHAPPY, OR
UNFULFILLED.
FOR IT IS ONLY
IN SUCH MOMENTS,
PROPELLED BY
OUR DISCOMFORT,
THAT WE ARE
LIKELY
TO STEP OUT
OF OUR RUTS
AND START
SEARCHING
FOR DIFFERENT
WAYS OR
TRUER ANSWERS.

M. SCOTT PECK, M.D.

TO YOUR HEALTH!

A Good Attitude Is Good for Your Body

Scientists are now confirming what the ancient wisdom of the Bible has said all along: “A cheerful heart is good medicine.”¹

Positive emotions can extend our life span and improve our physical and mental well-being. A study of Harvard graduates revealed that the way in which young men explained negative events—whether pessimistically or optimistically—indicated several physical health outcomes decades later. Specifically, optimism in early life predicted good health later in life.²

Alastair Cunningham, Ph.D., senior scientist at the Ontario Cancer Institute asked experts to predict the life span of patients with incurable cancer. Cunningham and his team then gathered data on each patient’s attitudes and behaviors as they expressed their feelings about cancer and received support from fellow victims during weekly group therapy sessions. The patients who worked the hardest at transforming themselves psychologically lived at least three times longer than predicted.³

Dr. Susan S. Knox, who studies the interaction of psychology and physiology at the NIH (National Institute of Health) National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute says, “Emotional factors have a major impact on physical health.” She describes negative emotions as “worrying incessantly, feeling friendless, and flying off the handle,” and says that such emotions “often lead to weaker immune systems, higher rates of heart disease, and other major health problems.”⁴

In a broad-based study of adults age 65 and older, positive emotion was shown to be a strong predictor of how long people lived. Happy people were half as likely to become disabled when compared to people who were generally sad.

In addition, those who live happy lives have a greater tolerance for physical pain than those who are sad.⁵

People who rate in the upper reaches of happiness on psychological tests develop about 50 percent more antibodies than average in response to flu vaccines. In addition, happiness or related mental states like hopefulness, optimism and contentment appear to reduce the risk or limit the severity of cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, diabetes, hypertension, colds and upper-respiratory infections.⁶

A RELAXED
ATTITUDE
LENGTHENS LIFE;
JEALOUSY ROTTS
IT AWAY.
PROVERBS 14:30 NLT

¹ Proverbs 17:22

² *How Full Is Your Bucket?* Tom Rath & Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., Gallup Press.

³ “Mind Over Cancer,” PsychologyToday.com by Rebecca A. Clay, Richard M. Suinn, March/April 2000.

⁴ *Simple Health: 20 Easy and Inexpensive Things You Can Do to Improve Your Health*, David B. Biebel, Harold G. Koenig, Strang Communications.

⁵ “The Benefits of Happiness,” www.upperbay.org/benefitsofhappiness Rich Bayer, Ph.D.

⁶ “The Biology of Joy,” Michael D. Lemonick, *Time*: 1-17-2005.

ATTITUDE -

It's Got More Power than You Think!

The well-documented data on the impact of attitude on health is impressive. Even more impressive, although not as scientifically documented, is the power of our attitudes to shape our life experiences and outcomes. Yet many of us don't even realize the power our attitudes wield.

Consider the response leadership expert John Maxwell received when he asked an audience to name what most determines happiness, acceptance, peace, and success. They mentioned job, education, money, time. Almost as an afterthought, someone said "attitude." Maxwell went on to emphasize that "attitude is the primary force that will determine whether we will succeed or fail."

Attitudes have been influencing people's lives and future opportunities for thousands of years. King Solomon, for example, the richest and wisest man who ever lived, had attitude problems that put a sour taste on the best life had to offer: "Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I gave in to every impulse, held back nothing. I sucked the marrow of pleasure out of every task—my reward to myself for a hard day's work! Then I took a good look at everything I'd done, looked at all the sweat and hard work. But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing" (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 MSG).

King Solomon's attitude apparently did not improve as time went on. Notice what happened to the nation of Israel as a result of Solomon's arrogant attitude: "So the LORD said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates'" (1 Kings 11:11).

Our attitudes not only affect us, they affect others as well. As John Maxwell points out, "There's only one thing more contagious than a good attitude—a bad attitude. A negative attitude hurts rather than helps the person who has it. And it also hurts the people around him."

If you want to know how true Maxwell's statement is, just ask Moses. When he sent the twelve spies into the Promised Land, ten of them said, "We can't attack those people; they're stronger than we are" (Numbers 13:31). The fearful, faithless attitude of ten men quickly spread to the entire nation. By nightfall, two to three million people were wailing and grumbling! That's attitude power out of control! In the end, the nation of Israel remained in the wilderness and for decades forfeited the hope and opportunity of the Promised Land.

Attitudes may seem small and unimportant, but they can be life changing. No wonder the Scriptures tell us to "Be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude" (Ephesians 4:23 AMP).

ATTITUDE IS
A LITTLE THING
THAT MAKES
A BIG
DIFFERENCE.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

AT LEAST IT'S A HAIR DAY! *By Margaret Cox*

I had anticipated a great week. The conference was scheduled to begin on Tuesday, and I would lead two workshops. I was excited and fully prepared for the event. I even had laid out my clothes for the whole week.

Then, on Monday morning, the tingling began. It wasn't from excitement. My whole scalp tingled and my hair felt like straw. The next morning, as my big day dawned, I stepped into the shower and my hair began falling out by the handful. So I put on my carefully chosen outfit and selected a coordinating scarf for my head.

Fortunately I found a piece of double-sided tape at the office to help keep the scarf from slipping. But as I spoke, my thoughts drifted. I wondered if the entire audience was staring at my wayward scarf. By week's end, all of my hair was gone.

My cancer battle changed my perspective on hair. I no longer look in the mirror as I get ready for my day and exclaim, "Oh no! It's a bad hair day!" I'm glad it's at least a hair day. And that perspective has carried over into other areas of my life as well. I am learning to be truly grateful for the blessings of life that I would otherwise take for granted, or even complain about—my job, husband, or kids, for example. My life isn't perfect, but God has *given* me these things that I would otherwise not have, and it is good to be grateful to the Lord for every blessing He gives.

Margaret Cox has overcome cancer four times and leads a cancer support group at her home church.

*It is good to give thanks
to the LORD*

PSALM 92:2 NASB

ONE OF JOHN MAXWELL'S FAVORITE STORIES IS ABOUT A GRANDPA AND GRANDMA WHO VISITED THEIR GRANDCHILDREN. EACH AFTERNOON GRANDPA WOULD LIE DOWN FOR A NAP. ONE DAY, AS A PRACTICAL JOKE, THE KIDS DECIDED TO PUT LIMBURGER CHEESE IN HIS MUSTACHE. QUITE SOON HE AWOKE, SNIFFING. "WHY THIS ROOM STINKS," HE EXCLAIMED AS HE GOT UP AND WENT OUT INTO THE KITCHEN. HE WASN'T THERE LONG UNTIL HE DECIDED THAT THE KITCHEN SMELLED TOO, SO HE WALKED OUTDOORS FOR A BREATH OF FRESH AIR. MUCH TO GRANDPA'S SURPRISE, THE OPEN AIR BROUGHT NO RELIEF, AND HE PROCLAIMED, "THE WHOLE WORLD STINKS!" HOW TRUE TO LIFE! WHEN WE CARRY "LIMBURGER CHEESE" IN OUR ATTITUDES, THE WHOLE WORLD SMELLS BAD."



Credit: Maxwell quotes from *Attitude 101* by John C. Maxwell, Thomas Nelson. Used by permission.

Good ATTITUDE?

BAD

ATTITUDE? YOU CAN CHOOSE!

When Wendy, a retired nurse, woke up with a numb left arm and shoulder, she knew something was terribly wrong. She had severely injured her neck years before, so the symptoms weren't a total surprise, but she never expected the intense pain she felt. With her primary care physician out on leave for breast cancer, Wendy had to deal with the added complication of on-call physicians who didn't know her or her medical history. Four days and sleepless nights later, she finally saw a physician for the first time. He ordered the appropriate tests and sent her home with pain medication and instructions to go to the emergency room if the pain became unmanageable.

The tests confirmed that the nerves to the upper left side of Wendy's body were being compressed by several bulging, unstable discs in her neck. Wendy would have to see a specialist for a complete diagnosis and treatment assessment. Unfortunately, she would have to wait six more pain-filled weeks for that appointment.

Wendy believed that the attitude she displayed during this trial would be especially important to family members and medical professionals who would be watching her closely. "From that first morning, I decided to respond to this crisis in a godly way and with a good attitude. I wanted my faith to make a visible difference in how I handled the situation." Not only that, Wendy had worked with patients whose negative attitudes had complicated their illnesses and made them unpleasant to be around. "I definitely didn't want to be one of them," she says.

As her physical trial continued during the ensuing months, Wendy discovered six key choices she needed to make in order to maintain a good attitude in the midst of her difficulties:

1. DECIDE EARLY IN THE DAY THAT HAVING A GOOD ATTITUDE IS A PRIORITY.

Wendy says this is the most significant choice she made each day. "Each morning I asked God to help me have a right attitude for the day, and I always felt that this desire and prayer was extremely pleasing to Him.

"God really answered this prayer. I had a heightened sensitivity to my attitudes. It was as if God had turned on a light inside my mind that showed me just how powerful my attitudes were in shaping my mood and responses—and how quickly they could change. Sometimes, when I faced a setback, my attitude would change so suddenly and powerfully that I would

AFFLICTIONS
COLOR YOUR
LIFE,
BUT YOU
CHOOSE
THE COLOR.

ANONYMOUS

have to pray for immediate help. I had to do that a lot on days when the pain was most severe.”

2. RESPOND QUICKLY TO ATTITUDE CHANGES. DON'T LET THEM GAIN GROUND.

“One of the attitudes with which I struggled most was impatience. As soon as the impatient tapes started playing in my head, I chose to counter them with more balanced thoughts.

“For example, when I heard, *Why can't the physician see me sooner?* I would tell myself, *You know, you're not the only sick person he is treating.* When I would think, *What is wrong with these insurance people? Why can't they just approve this?* I would remind myself, *They're just employees who have to follow company rules.*

“Most important, I realized that the longer I entertained negative thoughts, the harder it was to reign in a negative attitude. Negative thoughts are like weeds. If you pull them early, they're easier to control.”

3. DON'T LET EMOTIONS RUN THE SHOW.

“When we face adversity and when we hurt, our emotions let us know it! While we can't give our emotions free reign to dominate our experience and run the lives of everyone around us, we also can't deny or ignore them. We have to listen to our emotions because they are an important barometer of how we are doing. Then we have to learn to deal with them in a healthy way.

“When I'd get angry, for example, I might shed some tears or raise my voice, but I'd try to do it in a way that didn't victimize the people around me. Then I'd take time out to determine the reason for my anger and deal with the root cause. Of course there were times when I would deny or suppress my emotions, too. When I did, I found that my overall attitude quickly got worse. It was like trying to put a lid on a boiling pot: you have to let off some steam or you'll get burned.”

4. USE YOUR EMOTIONS TO HELP YOU UNCOVER TROUBLESOME ATTITUDES.

“At times during my ordeal, I felt bad about myself. Usually I noticed the bad feelings first, and then I could identify the bad attitude behind them. For example, I sometimes felt isolated, alone and sad. I would retreat from people and wonder why they didn't notice that I was hurting. I would feel as if something must be wrong with me that caused them not to care. Then I would start to feel sorry for myself.

“I was wallowing in self pity! But I didn't realize it until I took a closer look at what my feelings were telling me. In time I learned that bad feelings about myself were a clue that I needed to address some negative attitudes lurking in the background. It isn't easy to identify bad attitudes when you're

NEGATIVE
THOUGHTS
ARE LIKE
WEEDS.
IF YOU
PULL THEM
EARLY,
THEY'RE
EASIER
TO CONTROL.

hurting, worn out and not at your best, but listening to your feelings can help you find them.”

5. RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT OF PAIN AND DEAL WITH IT APPROPRIATELY.

“Pain is exhausting, and exhaustion is one of the quickest triggers for a negative attitude. The more I hurt, the harder I had to fight to keep a good attitude. My temptation was to ignore the pain and live my life as if nothing was wrong. That wasn’t a good idea. I had to choose to give myself time to rest. I had to give myself grace to live within my physical limitations. When I made those choices, my attitude was much better.”

6. TAKE TIME OUT TO LOOK FOR THE SILVER LINING!

“Every time I experienced a setback, I would allow myself to react to it. Sometimes I prayed, sometimes I cried, sometimes I talked it over with a friend, sometimes I took a nap. Then I would deliberately stop, step back, and look for the silver lining. I chose not to let bad news be the last news.

“I believe with all my heart that God is good; that He is in control. So I knew He would use my difficulties for good. When I began actively looking for the good, I was surprised by how much I found! God wasn’t wasting my life or my pain; He was using it to work in the lives of many people for whom I had prayed for years. And to think, I could have missed these blessings if I hadn’t been looking for them.”

**PAIN IS
EXHAUSTING,
AND
EXHAUSTION
IS ONE OF
THE QUICKEST
TRIGGERS
FOR A
NEGATIVE
ATTITUDE.**

Attitude Is a Choice

A well-poised and proud 92-year-old man, who, even though he is legally blind, is fully dressed and perfectly shaved by eight o’clock each morning, moved to a nursing home today. His wife of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary. After hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, he smiled sweetly when told his room was ready.

As he maneuvered his walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of his tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on his window.

“I love it,” he stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy.

“Mr. Jones, you haven’t seen the room; just wait.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” he replied. “Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether or not I like

my room doesn’t depend on how the furniture is arranged; it’s how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it.

“It’s a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I’ll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I’ve stored away just for this time in my life.”

Reprinted from an email that most likely circled the globe.

Five Simple Rules to be Happy:

- 1. Free your heart of hatred**
- 2. Free your mind from worry**
- 3. Live simply**
- 4. Give more**
- 5. Expect less**

Resources That Can Renew Your Attitude



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FOR THE JOURNEY

DON'T COPY THE BEHAVIOR AND CUSTOMS OF THIS WORLD, BUT LET GOD TRANSFORM YOU INTO A NEW PERSON BY CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK.

ROMANS 12:2 (NLT)

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THINGS IS LIKELY TO BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE THINGS THEMSELVES.

A.W. TOZER

SOME PEOPLE COMPLAIN BECAUSE GOD PUT THORNS ON ROSES, WHILE OTHERS PRAISE HIM FOR PUTTING ROSES AMONG THORNS.

ANONYMOUS

AS A MAN THINKS WITHIN HIMSELF, SO IS HE.

PROVERBS 23:7 (NASB)

A PESSIMIST IS A PERSON WHO, REGARDLESS OF THE PRESENT, IS DISAPPOINTED IN THE FUTURE.

ANONYMOUS

ATTITUDE IS THE LIBRARIAN OF OUR PAST, THE SPEAKER OF OUR PRESENT, THE PROPHET OF OUR FUTURE.

JOHN MAXWELL

AN OPTIMIST SEES AN OPPORTUNITY IN EVERY CALAMITY;
A PESSIMIST SEES A CALAMITY IN EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

HERBERT V. PROCHNOW

THANKFULNESS THAT IS PUT INTO WORDS HAS A HEALING EFFECT UPON THE SOUL AND HAS A GOOD EFFECT UPON THOSE WHO HEAR.

A.W. TOZER

THERE IS NO SADDER SIGHT THAN A YOUNG PESSIMIST.

MARK TWAIN

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT- SOMETIMES IT TAKES A WHILE By Amanda Sorenson

Having a good attitude in the midst of a trying situation isn't easy, and often we beat ourselves up for not instantly having the "right" attitude. But let's be honest, sometimes having a good attitude is more than we can manage. We may know where we need to go, but it may take us some time to get there—and that's okay. Making an attitude adjustment isn't an easy process. Whenever I think of the ups and downs of that process, I remember a phone call I received early one morning after a fall blizzard blasted across the Front Range of Colorado.

"How much snow do you have?" my friend asked. Without waiting for an answer, she said, "I think we have nearly three feet!"

"That's about what it looks like," I answered. "Our husbands sure picked a great time to be hunting. I haven't even started to dig out yet, and the weather report says they hardly got anything in the mountains."

"Yeah, aren't we lucky," my friend said, "I'm going out to unbury my car now."

About two hours later, she called back, and she was furious! "I have never been so angry at my husband before in my life!"

"Why? What did he do?"

"Not only did he take the four-wheel drive on his hunting trip, he took both shovels! So I had to dig my car out of three feet of snow with a *dustpan!*"

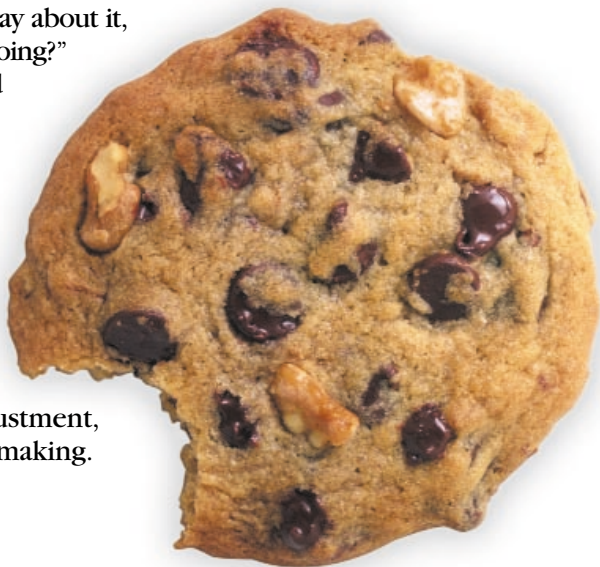
"Oh, that's not fun," I sympathized. "I bet your hands got really cold."

"*Wet* and cold," she corrected me. "But that's not the worst of it. At the beginning of the week I started asking him to check the tires on my car before he left because I thought one of them might be low. He promised to do it. So I dug my car out of three feet of snow—with a dustpan, mind you—only to find that my back tire is flatter than flat! I am so angry at him! I've never been this angry. I know I need to pray about it, but do you know what I am doing?"

"I can't imagine," I replied hesitantly.

"I'm making a batch of chocolate chip cookies. And then, I am going to eat as many of them as I want to. And then, when I'm good and ready, I'll pray about it!"

I laughed and, knowing that it wouldn't take her too long to make an attitude adjustment, left my friend to her cookie making.



B-B-B-BUT DO I REALLY HAVE TO CHANGE MY ATTITUDE?

No one who is alive and breathing has a perfect attitude all of the time. Most of us readily admit that our attitudes need adjustment, especially if suffering has revealed some of our less desirable attitude tendencies. But the thought of actually changing our attitudes can be overwhelming.

Instead of owning up to our bad attitudes, we often justify them: "I've been sick for so long. If anyone has earned the right to be pessimistic, it's me." Or, we blame others when our attitudes fall short: "My family life was so hard growing up that I learned to be self-centered just to survive." At other times, we refuse to see the harm in our attitudes: "So what if I have a pity party? It isn't hurting anyone." And sometimes we simply deny our need to deal with problem attitudes: "My attitude just isn't that big a deal. Look at all the other things I'm doing right."

If any of these justifications sound familiar to you, take note. There is one unchanging and inescapable reason for correcting our bad attitudes: God tells us to. Philippians 2:5 couldn't be more clear: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Why would God care about our attitudes?

First, we are God's beloved children, and bad attitudes are detrimental to us and the life He wants us to live. Bad attitudes create distance in our relationship with Him and lead to brokenness and dysfunction in our relationships on earth. God wants to heal our brokenness and set us free from attitudes that perpetuate pain. That is why Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "There must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true (NLT). Quite simply, bad attitudes conflict with who we are.

Second, as God's beloved children, we are heirs to all of His creation. He wants us to grow up into that heritage and position. He wants us to have the same attitudes that Jesus did because these attitudes befit our divine nature and calling. When we are hurting, we easily lose sight of who we are and where we are headed. So dealing with our attitudes is a foundational part of our training to be more like Christ.

In his book, *A Small Book About God*, Roy Hicks, Jr. sums up why our attitudes are so important: "You will never become what you want to become, let alone what God wants you to become, until you become a person who accepts responsibility for who you are and begin to respond in a godly way to life's circumstances."

Choose Your Rut Carefully!

I'm told that in northern Canada there are just two seasons: winter and July. When the back roads begin to thaw they become muddy. Vehicles going into the backwoods country leave deep ruts that become frozen when cold weather returns. For those entering remote areas during the winter months, there are signs that read, "Driver, please choose carefully which rut you drive in, because you'll be in it for the next twenty miles." —*John Maxwell*

DIVINE HELP FOR AN ATTITUDE CHANGE

Once we admit that we need to make attitude adjustments, where do we start? It's really quite simple. We start with the source of our attitudes—our thinking. Attitudes are nothing more than habits of thought. So to change our attitudes, we have to change the way we think. Perhaps this is why the Scriptures tell us, "This is what the LORD God Almighty says, 'Give careful thought to your ways'" (Haggai 1:7).

The person who gives careful thought to what he or she does, thinks, plans, says and desires probably will have a high level of attitude awareness. But we need more than just awareness. We need to direct our thoughts in the right direction. If we want to have the same attitude that Jesus had, we need to fill our hearts and minds with His thoughts. So the Bible is our number one tool for reshaping our thoughts, which will, in turn, be evident in our attitudes.

It sounds simple—and it is—but it isn't necessarily easy. We often have serious attitude struggles when we begin to consistently read and study the Scriptures in order to train ourselves in the attitude of Jesus. Struggles with the discipline of regular Bible study may reveal an attitude of laziness. Our resistance to planning regular reading time in our schedule may reveal an attitude of rebellion. Feelings of indifference or skepticism toward Scripture because we are uncertain of the outcome of our efforts may reveal attitudes of doubt or stubbornness.

Our experience of these attitudes shows just how desperately we need to change the way we think and act! It also reveals how much we need God's help in making attitude adjustments. And God is always available to help us. He will always hear our prayers for help and strength. Not only that, we can ask Him to open our eyes so that we can understand the truth of His Word in a life-changing way.

Making much-needed attitude changes may be a struggle, but God has been helping his children take on the attitude of Christ for a long time. Consider the human frustration and the divine hope expressed in Romans 7:18-25 (MSG). It is the same hope to which everyone who desires the attitude of Christ can cling:

I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. . . . Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.

DEAR GOD, PLEASE HELP ME WITH MY ATTITUDE. I ADMIT THAT SOME OF MY ATTITUDES ARE WRONG. I ADMIT THAT I NEED YOUR HELP TO CHANGE THEM, TO EVEN WANT TO CHANGE THEM. GOD, PLEASE GIVE ME THE WILL AND CONVICTION TO WANT AN ATTITUDE THAT PLEASES YOU. GIVE ME THE STRENGTH AND COURAGE TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE SO THAT MY ATTITUDE BECOMES LIKE MY SAVIOR'S. AMEN

THREE TACTICS FOR THE TOUGH SPOTS

Be realistic. It won't happen fast. It won't be easy. Nor will your resolve be permanent overnight. Periodic failures, however are still better than habitual slavery. — Chuck Swindoll

Our thought life and attitudes can be almost automatic, like a well-traveled rut into which we easily fall. It can take considerable effort and time to keep our thoughts from slipping back into those familiar, well-worn grooves. This is particularly true when we encounter longstanding (and sometimes well-fortified!) attitudes.

These attitudes are ones we've had for a while. They didn't just appear because of our experience with suffering—our suffering merely made them more obvious. They have deep roots and won't go away simply because we want them to. We'll have to do some digging—and some serious praying to get rid of them. But there are three toxic tactics that have proven to be deadly to most overgrown attitudes.

1. THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME A BAD ATTITUDE HABIT IS TO REPLACE IT WITH A GOOD ONE.

Wendy knew that one of her bad habits was selfishness, but weeks of relentless pain, “kicked the bad habit of ‘me first’ into overdrive. It was ugly and I knew I had to deal with it.” So in every conversation with another person, Wendy made a conscious choice to ask how that person was doing. The results were amazing. “Conversations were more balanced. I think my friends and family appreciated my interest in their lives. It reassured them to know that I still cared about them even though I was in pain. Not only that, it gave me a reprieve by transporting me from my small, pain-filled world into the bigger world where people were getting new jobs, falling in love and living life.”

2. WHEN BAD ATTITUDES ARE THE RESULT OF INJURY, FORGIVE THE PAST.

Chuck had been deeply wounded by a high-achieving father who didn't understand his son. During his teenage years, Chuck tried time and time again to please his father and earn his respect, but each time he ended up feeling like a failure. Eventually Chuck gave up and fought back the only way he knew how: he rebelled. That rebellion defined Chuck through much of his adult life. It was only through concentrated work on his attitude *and* forgiveness of his father's shortcomings that Chuck found release from the bondage of rebellion.

3. THE POWER OF A BAD ATTITUDE SHRIVELS WHEN EXPOSED TO THE LIGHT OF TRUTH.

Kelly had grown up under her mother's loving, but extremely controlling attitude. That ingrained attitude led Kelly to control her home and family life as well. But the stress of her husband's cancer battle forced Kelly to step back and take a look at how she approached life. Through counseling and Bible study, Kelly uncovered the roots of her controlling attitude. “My controlling attitude had been with me forever,” she explains, “and I will probably have to battle it for a long time. But learning the truth about it—just as the Bible tells us (John 3:32)—has set me free to deal with it appropriately.”

EXIT STRATEGY FOR AN ATTITUDE RUT

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

What's the antidote to doing time in an attitude rut? If you want to get out quick and stay out, reach for a dose of gratitude! As difficult as it may be to live in an attitude of thankfulness when we're hurting, there is life-changing power in gratitude.

Gratitude lifts our eyes from the dark and dreary rut in which we feel trapped and focuses our attention on the God who parts seas, walks on water and raises the dead.

Gratitude directs our heart's focus from the wounds and weaknesses that plunged us into the rut to our all-powerful God who never stops working on our behalf to bring an eternity of healing, redemption and joy in His presence.

Gratitude replaces our fear with renewed faith because it reminds us that no matter how hopeless we feel, the universe is not spiraling out of control. Our sovereign God has the last word. In the end, everything is in His control and He will make suffering and sorrow cease forever.

Gratitude reminds us that our present circumstances are truly temporary and enhances our desire for our permanent home in heaven.

Gratitude can improve our mental and physical health because it causes us to look forward to the good that is to come and focus on the goodness and love of God.

Gratitude provides us a temporary reprieve from the demands of our wants, needs and problems and fills us with appreciation for what we already have.

Gratitude places us in right relationship with God. We are the children; He is the Father. We are the created; He is the Creator. We are dependent Him for our every breath; He deserves our heartfelt gratitude.

While it can be encouraging to remember the helpful and healing benefits of a grateful attitude, thanking God in the midst of pain is still difficult. Despite a sincere desire to be thankful, we may struggle to find anything good for which we can express our gratitude. We're more likely to give God our laundry list of complaints and needs and wait for our situation to improve before we express our thanks.

But 1 Thessalonians 5:18 doesn't give us permission to pick and choose when to be thankful. It tells us to "give thanks in all circumstances." Note that

it doesn't say to give thanks *for* all circumstances; it says to give thanks *in* all circumstances." It sounds like a tall order, but thanking God in the midst of our suffering is possible because of Romans 8:28:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Everything! Our victories and defeats, good days and bad, health and sickness, gains and losses and joys and sorrows are all in God's hands. Even on the days we can't see beyond our pain, He is working to bring good out of our greatest difficulties and worst tragedies. For that we can be forever grateful.

Gratitude, like rain, waters our faith and causes it to grow. The more we thank God, the stronger our faith becomes. As our faith grows stronger, we begin to focus on who God is and the amazing future that awaits us in His presence. When our focus turns to God, no rut can contain us!

ATTITUDES THAT ENCOURAGE

A thankful disposition will always find some cause for cheer, and a gloomy one will find a cloud in the brightest sky and a fly in the sweetest ointment. Let us cultivate a spirit of cheerfulness, and we shall find so much in God and in our lives to encourage us that we shall have no room for doubt or fear.

A. B. Simpson

THANKFUL NO MATTER WHAT

When we are in desperate pain, it is easy to feel that we have nothing for which to be thankful. But it only takes a quick look at Scripture to prime the pump of gratefulness. No matter what our circumstances, we can *always* thank God for:

His gift of salvation (Romans 6:23)

All of the promises in His Word (Psalm 119:160)

Heaven, our eternal home where He awaits us (John 14:2, 3)

We can *always* be thankful that God:

Never leaves or forsakes us (Hebrews 13:5)

Lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25)

Is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18)

Provides new mercies every morning (Lamentations 3:22, 23)

Is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24)

Gives us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17)

Will work all things together for good (Romans 8:28)

TRAINING FOR AN ATTITUDE CHANGE

Changing our attitudes requires us to change the way we think, and that is a process that doesn't happen overnight. It may take weeks, months or even longer to "retrain" our attitudes. Like an athlete in training, those of us in "attitude training" need to focus on the specific exercises that will enable us to reach our goal. Perhaps you can use the reminders on the ATTITUDE acrostic as "training stations" help keep on track while you train for a better attitude. Post them on your computer, on the fridge, in your planner—wherever you will see them every day.

Ask God to help you have a right attitude. Ask Him often for:

Teachability, for a heart that is willing to embrace change.

Truth, so you know what to change and how.

Insight into the obstacles that keep you from changing.

Tenacity, so you don't give up when you experience setbacks.

Understanding of the Scriptures, the source for right thoughts and attitudes.

Desire to have a right attitude, the same attitude as Jesus.

Endurance to continue to work diligently on your attitude.

