

## Attitude Busters

### John 15:5-8

We are in the midst of a series of messages on attitude. So far we've talked about the importance of our attitude and the development of our attitude. This morning we're going to talk about attitude busters – we're going to look at some things that can cause our attitude to go downhill. First, we're going to consider some internal factors and then we're going to consider some external factors. But before we do this, I'd like to give you three rules to remember when you're having a bad day – when you sense that your attitude is losing altitude.

**Rule #1 – Maintain the right attitude when the going gets tough.** When the going gets tough, what really matters is what happens **IN** us not **TO** us. An external circumstance becomes a real problem when it leads to a wrong internal reaction.

About a month ago I was reading about a Christian who was having financial problems. He was faced with the possibility of losing everything he had. But he never felt closer to God. This man's problem could have led to a nervous breakdown. But instead, it drew him closer to God.

Listen carefully. The storms of life can actually strengthen us. James tells us that difficult situations **CAN** be good. This is what he says in James 1:2-4. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

A few weeks ago I made this statement: "Life is like a grindstone. Whether it grinds you down or polishes you, depends on what you're made of." If you maintain the right attitude when the going gets tough, the grindstone of life will polish you.

**Rule #2 – Understand that the rough weather won't last forever.** When we're in the middle of a storm we need to remember that the sunshine is on its way.

When one of life's many storms comes your way, hang in there. In Galatians 6:9, the Apostle Paul says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest **IF** we do not give up." If we don't grow weary, if we keep sowing a good attitude during the storms of life, we will eventually reap a good harvest.

**Rule #3 – Always keep in touch with the control tower.** Every pilot knows the value of keeping in touch with the right person during a storm. When a pilot runs into turbulent weather in the sky what does he do – he radios the control tower.

When a storm of life comes our way we need to "radio" Jesus – we need to call on him in prayer. He's our control tower. He's the one who can get us through the storms of life.

Some Christians think they can get through the storms of life on their own. Not a chance! In John 15:5, Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." The sooner we accept this truth, the better off we'll be.

John 15:5 tells us that we (as Christians) are the branches and Jesus is the Vine. Things will be fine as long as we're connected to the Vine. We need to keep in constant touch with Jesus – in stormy weather **AND** when the sky is blue.

Maintain the right attitude when the going gets tough. Understand that the rough weather won't last forever. And always keep in touch with the control tower. Remember and follow these three rules when you sense that your attitude is losing altitude.

At this point, let's look at some factors that can cause our attitudes to go downhill. First, we'll consider three internal factors.

One internal factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is fear of failure. People deal with failure in different ways: some hide it; some deny it; some hate it; some fear it. The right way to deal with failure is to accept it. We need to accept it because failure is a necessary step to success.

All successful people experience failure. When the great tenor, Enrico Caruso, went for his first voice lesson, his teacher told him that his voice sounded like the wind whistling through a window. Henry Ford forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car. Thomas Edison spent two million dollars on an invention that proved to be of little value.

Failures are the fingerprints on the road to achievement. In The Purpose-Driven Church, Rick Warren (one of the most successful pastors of our day) says, "We've tried more things that didn't work at Saddleback [Church] than did. We've never been afraid of failure; we just consider everything an experiment. I could fill another book with stories of our failures and call it 1000 Ways to NOT Grow a Church!"

Don't allow fear of failure OR failure to keep you from achieving great things. The person with the right attitude never quits. As the old saying goes, "If at first you don't succeed try, try again."

Another internal factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is discouragement.

One of my favorite Bible stories is found in 1 Kings 18. In 1 Kings 18 the prophet Elijah goes to Mount Carmel (not the town in the coal regions; the mountain in Israel) and shows the prophets of Baal who's in charge. What an experience. Elijah was on top of the world. His God was the King of kings and Lord of lords. But if you read on you discover in 1 Kings 19 that Elijah is discouraged. We're told that he was afraid and ran for his life – that he sat down under a tree and prayed that he might die (see vs. 3,4). Folks, if the prophet Elijah got discouraged, you and I can certainly get discouraged. And discouragement is contagious.

A man was about to jump off a bridge. A police officer spotted him and moved slowly toward him. When the police officer got within a few inches of the man he said, "Surely nothing could be bad enough for you to take your life. Tell me about it. Talk to me."

So the man told the police officer his story. He told the officer how his wife had left him; how his business had gone bankrupt; how his friends had deserted him; how everything in life had lost its meaning. For thirty minutes this man told his sad story ... and then both he and the police officer jumped off the bridge.

All of us are subject to discouragement. But I'm convinced that if we are aware of the major causes of discouragement we can often avoid discouragement.

The following are four common causes of discouragement. First, we become discouraged when we believe that opportunity for success is gone.

Sometime ago I was reading about a boy who played the outfield in Little League. A man stopped to watch the game and asked the boy the score. The boy smiled and said, "We're behind 18 to 0." With a puzzled look the man said, "It's 18 to 0 and you don't look the least bit discouraged." "Discouraged?" the boy replied. "Why should I be discouraged? We haven't come to bat, yet!" That's the kind of spirit you and I need to have.

Second, discouragement comes our way when we become selfish. In some cases, people who are discouraged are thinking mostly about one thing – themselves.

Discouragement can also set in when we are not immediately successful in our efforts to accomplish something. Eddie Arcaro, one of the world's greatest jockeys, lost 250 races before we won. We conquer by continuing.

We can also become discouraged when there is a lack of purpose in our lives.

What can we do overcome discouragement? Let me give you four practical suggestions.

First, take positive action. The moment you are certain of the source of discouragement, get busy. Nothing delivers us from discouragement more quickly than taking positive steps to solve the problem.

Second, think positively. It's up to you to decide how you're going to handle the defeats of life. No one will go through life without meeting defeat from time to time. When it happens to you don't quit. When life kicks you let it kick you forward!

Third, look for a positive example. Seek out winners. Learn from them.

Fourth, practice positive persistence. Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination. Never give up.

A third internal factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is sin. Sin is anything that is contrary to the Word and will of God. Sin is an internal factor because it begins in the mind. Listen to words of James 1:14,15. "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire [sin is rooted in the sinful nature and is conceived in the mind], he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

Sin is a problem. It's a problem for all of us (see 1 John 1:8,10). When sin enters our life, our attitude begins to falter. How do we deal with the sin in our life?

The right way to deal with sin is God's way. There's only one way to make a wrong right. Getting right with God and/or people is a four step process.

Repentance (sin forsaken) – you feel sorry for your sin and turn away from it, making a sincere effort not to do it again.

Confession (sin confessed) – you confess your sin to God (all sin is against God) and/or the person you've sinned against; if necessary you make restitution.

Forgiveness (sin forgiven) – God forgives you (he always forgives if your repentance is sincere) and so does the person you've sinned against (hopefully this will happen).

Restoration (joy restored) – once again, things are right between you and God and/or the person you've sinned against, and you feel good about it.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." In 1 John 1:9 we find these words: "If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteous." Confession is good for the soul!

These, then, are some internal factors that can cause our attitude to go downhill. At this point, let's turn our attention to external factors that can cause our attitude to go downhill. We'll consider four of them.

The first external factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is criticism (statements people make to tear us down). No one can escape criticism. Even Jesus – who was perfect – was criticized. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus is called a glutton and a drunkard. In Matthew 9:11, Jesus is criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. And in John 8:48, Jesus is accused of being demon-possessed.

Here on Earth we will always be subject to criticism. Criticism happens! What we need to understand is that criticism hurts us most when we react to it the wrong way.

In one of the episodes of the old “Amos ‘n’ Andy Show” (most of us aren’t old enough to remember this show) Amos was tired of Andy’s constant criticism. What irritated Amos the most was the way Andy would stick his finger in Amos’ chest. One day Amos bought some dynamite, taped it to his chest, and told his friend Kingfish, “The next time Andy criticizes me and pokes me in the chest this dynamite will blow his hand off!” Unfortunately, Amos didn’t stop to think about what the dynamite would do to his chest! Be careful how you react to criticism.

What is the right way to react to criticism? In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says, “Love your enemies [someone who is trying to tear you down isn’t your friend] and pray for those who persecute you.” Critical people can’t stand that kind of a reaction. When critical people see that their criticism isn’t upsetting you, they usually stop criticizing you.

A second external factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is problems. Life is full of problems. Problems happen! And Christians aren’t exempt (see John 16:33).

Since we’re all faced with problems, we need to be prepared to deal with problems. Let me suggest three simple steps to solving problems.

First, anticipate – recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency. A professional boxer named Joe Torres said this: The punch that knocks you out is the punch you didn’t see coming.”

Second, understand – someone has said “a problem well-stated is half-solved”.

Third, alternate. Ask yourself, “What are the alternatives?” Basically there are two alternatives: we can either alter the difficulty or alter ourselves. What can be changed for the best, we must change. But when this kind of change is impossible, WE must adjust to the circumstances in a positive way. Whatever the case may be, always remember that there is no problem that you and God cannot solve.

A third external factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is change. Most people are creatures of habit. Most people resist change. A lot of people hate change. Yet without change there would be no progress. A certain amount of change is good for all of us.

Two things should be kept in mind when contemplating change: there should always be a good reason for change AND you should always consider the people who will be affected by change. With the right attitude change will result in growth.

A fourth and final external factor that can cause our attitude to go downhill is negativism.

Once there was a man who lived by the side of a road and sold hotdogs. He was hard of hearing, so he didn’t have a radio. He had trouble with his eyes, so he didn’t read the newspaper. But he sold good hotdogs. He put up signs on the highway, advertising his hotdogs, and more and more people stopped and bought them. The man’s business was booming. Then one day the man’s son came home from college. The son said, “Dad, haven’t you been listening to the radio? Haven’t you been reading the newspaper? We’re in a recession! The situation in Europe is terrible, and the domestic situation is even worse!” The father began to think, “Gee, my son’s been to college; he reads the newspaper, he listens to the radio, he should know what’s going on.” So the father cancelled his hotdog and bun order, he took down his signs, and he stopped selling

hotdogs. Weeks later the man said to his son, “You were right. We ARE in the middle of a recession.”

One of the saddest stories in the Bible is found in Numbers 13 and 14 (this is the classic example of how someone else’s negativism can affect us). In Numbers 13:1 we read, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Send some men to explore the land of Canaan WHICH I AM GIVING TO THE ISRAELITES. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.’” So twelve spies were chosen and went to Canaan to explore the land.

When the spies returned two of them (Joshua and Caleb) reported that the Promised Land was everything God said it would be. It was a land flowing with milk and honey! But the other ten spies gave a negative report. They said that the people who lived in Canaan were powerful and the cities were well fortified. They said, “No way can we conquer these people!” And then the spies “spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored” (Numb 13:32).

What happened next? In Numbers 14:1-4 we read, “That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to each other, ‘We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’”

Clearly the negativism of the ten spies had a negative affect on the people of Israel. What was the end result? With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, every male twenty years of age and older failed to enter the Promised Land.

Listen carefully. Don’t allow negativism, or any other factor, to keep you from the blessings of God. Don’t allow anyone or anything to limit your potential. You can be all that you were meant to be IF you maintain the right attitude!