

Altitude and Attitude

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Philippians 2:14-15

“Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”

Life coach, motivational speaker, and author Zig Ziglar wrote: “It is your attitude, more than your aptitude, that will determine your altitude.”

If you are a pilot, you have an additional meaning to the word ‘attitude’, which describes their plane’s horizontal relationship with the runway. It refers to the orientation of the aircraft relative to the Earth’s horizon in terms of ‘yaw’, which is the wings tipping right or left, or in terms of ‘pitch’, which is the nose pointing up or down relative to the ground. Rarely does a commercial airplane bank more than 30° or climb at greater than 30°. But smaller private crafts can spin 360° and fly at a 90° bank or even upside down at 180°. They can climb straight up and go over backwards. In these types of planes attitude is meaningless and fluid, until you need to land...then it is extremely important.

So Zig Ziglar’s catchy phrase applies to aeronautics as well as life. In a plane, the attitude definitely determines the altitude at which you fly. Similarly, our emotional and spiritual attitude toward circumstances, people, or situations most definitely affects how far we are going to get in life; how high we are to fly, so to speak.

Our attitude determines how successful we will be when it comes to facing challenges, approaching change, and dealing with difficult people and situations. It even effects how we perceive ourselves.

There is nothing more exhilarating than being around people who exude the energy of endless possibilities. We need these kinds of people in our lives if we wish to see what we can accomplish. When we surround ourselves with people who always see the negative and dark side of life we are drained of energy and vitality. Therefore, the choice is up to us - do we want to reach the stars, or do we want to stay on the ground content with looking up and just wishing that we were among the brilliant lights that grace the heavens. A strong, positive and resilient attitude will help elevate our thoughts to unimaginable heights.

Although there are many negative attitudes that we could focus on that block us from seeing and feeling the Christ within, such as negativity, criticalness, rebellion, defiance, impatience, uncooperation, apathy, discouragement, independence, presumption, arrogance, self-centeredness, and rudeness, I want to focus on just one this morning: entitlement.

Entitlement is that feeling, belief, or philosophy that we are more important and worthy than others and so expect to be compensated by life and God more abundantly. We believe we are owed something in life and are inherently deserving of privileges, greater portions, or special treatment. People with an entitlement attitude

believe they have the right to take what they want; they are here to be served.

For the rest of us, this is a difficult attitude to experience. These are sad individuals who don't understand the value of others. They mistake possession for power, and believe they deserve something without earning it.

With entitlement, there is a lack of humility and a lack of respect for others. They live in the antithesis of Philippians 2:3-5, which says, "*Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" There is nothing wrong with looking to what is important to us. But we are instructed to look to what is important to others, as well.

We are missing this in today's America. So many people only want what they want; they are only interested in what they can get out of something and ignore everyone else. This attitude is evident from what is happening in the government, to what is happening on the streets and neighborhoods. We have subdivided ourselves into smaller and smaller groups of thinking, without the least interest in anyone else's ideas or opinions or input.

As we cling tighter and tighter to our own small gang of thought, we become more emboldened to speak out, to act out in ways that we would not previously consider. You've probably heard the adage, "You reflect the three closest people in your life." Who are we close to? Many of us are so isolated that the only people we are close to are the talking heads we spend hours listening to on the

television. In some instances, our group is gone, but their influence has remained unchallenged

Who have we given, or are giving, the power to influence our thoughts, words, and actions? If someone can influence our thinking, they can control our words and behaviors; they dictate who we are, where we are going, and what decisions we will make.

Are we being told by our influencers that we are more deserving than others who don't look like us, think like us, vote like us, worship like us, or don't like the same kind of music, food or clothing? Have we been told that we are entitled to rights that others are not entitled to, freedoms that others are not deserving of, benefits and relationships that others are not worthy of having?

It is troubling when people believe they are entitled and others are not. This is not what Christ teaches; this is not what Spirit whispers to the soul. The opposite of entitlement is being humble. Humility is not a natural human quality; it must be recognized, accepted, and then practiced. Our normal, non-spiritual, ego-filled earthly response to situations is to take as much as we can, protect ourselves and step on as many people as possible to get ahead, lying and cheating if we have to; sometimes worse.

Few people dream of a minimum wage job, working the gate of a military installation, or serving food in the chow hall, but the humble will gratefully accept those positions if it means they can feed their families. No one wants to wait in line or give someone else a choice parking spot. But through humility, we can do almost anything graciously.

From our lowest human perspective, we are worthier than others; our gang is worthier than other gangs. Our time is more important, and our ideas more cogent than anyone else. How do I know that my ideas are better, that I am basically better than others? – because my group of people who I have allowed to influence me told me so.

The sense of entitlement in this country has become epidemic. From the poorest people to the wealthiest, many people believe they deserve more than what they have right now. There is no cure for anyone else because the only person we can heal is our self. If we have started to believe that we deserve more than someone else, now is the time to stop and examine our life philosophy. We need to check our relationship with Christ. God sees every individual soul just as valuable as every other soul despite their financial or social status. Status, fame, wealth, power are all earthly traits that are only important to particular groups of human influencers – not God. God has no interest in any of that. As a Child of God, our soul has no interest in any of that. Even our pets have no interest in those things. It is only our ego that cares about status or wealth.

Entitlement points our vessel toward the ground, not the stars. It is only as we raise our thinking and awareness upward that we can attain the abundance, peace, joy, and love we crave.

Just as the pilot is in control of his aircraft and can make the appropriate adjustments as necessary for a successful flight, we are in control of our life and can make whatever adjustments required.

First, it takes prayer time. We may not see a poor attitude in ourselves; it may be "...all their fault." But as we spend time in prayer, listening for God's still small voice, new ideas enter our hearts and minds. We realize that our situation is all our doing; our decisions impact our lives. Perhaps the people that we listen to are having a negative effect on our minds and beliefs after all. The solution is to ask other people their opinions. We can seek counsel and a new perspective from someone we trust.

Once we become aware of what is influencing our decisions, we can beware of those influences and change our focus. Our attitude forms every event in our life, whether we realize it or not. Our attitude directs our enjoyment of life and gratitude for all our blessings.

Much of our sense of entitlement comes from a lack of gratitude. If we are not grateful for the abundance of what we have, our attitude can turn to one of disappointment and anger about how things have turned out. If we are not thankful for our life or opportunities, our attitude can sour when we do the right thing and are not given a break. If we are not grateful for the gifts that we have, our attitude can turn defeatist, and we begin to bemoan that we are not good enough, or that no accomplishment will ever be good enough. Gratitude is a powerful force against a tendency toward entitlement.

Another technique is to stop comparing ourselves with others – our jobs, lives, relationships, status – all the worldly accoutrements. It must finally be admitted that no one in the world can be a better 'you' than you. We are each on our own path; we each run our own race. It is our journey, with our lessons. We can't go on

someone else's adventure; that's crazy. We have our own adventure, and our quest is perfect for us.

And while our quest is perfect, and life is beautiful, it is not fair.
The Paradoxical Commandments by Dr. Kent M. Keith (1968)

~ People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

~ If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

~ If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

~ The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

~ Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

~ The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

~ People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

~ What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

~ People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

~ Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

Mother Theresa was given credit for an altered version to which she added: In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Everyday our attitude is challenged by other people and by external factors. Will we allow adversity to stop us from moving forward and taking the steps that we know to be right? Will we allow a negative person to ruin our day, make us lose our cool, or force us to give up on our dreams? When such temptations come knocking on our door, we can stand at the door of our mind and declare powerfully and silently, “Bless you, and go on your way.”

Our attitude is everything when it comes to our life, and one of our greatest allies is humility. Proverbs 3:34 states: *The Lord resists the proud; but he gives grace to the humble.* I’ve read that, “The culture of humility leads to gratitude, appreciation, and contentment.” I pray that we can release any feeling of entitlement, but rather, generate an environment of humility within and around us so that we can become more grateful and content. We are no more or less deserving than anyone else. If we can just reach out and touch just one person today in a positive, loving, humble manner, we may not change the world, but we can change the moment. Then, moment by moment we can make a difference.

Let us pray....