



How High Will You Climb?

THE SUMMARY

Thomas Nelson 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Maxwell founded the John Maxwell Company, John Maxwell Team, and EQUIP, organizations that have trained more than 5 million leaders in 185 countries.

SECTION I: THE CONSIDERATION OF YOUR ATTITUDE

Chapter 1: It's a Bird, It's a Plane, No, It's an Attitude!

Don't individuals' attitudes dictate their performance? Do they have an "attitude indicator" that continually evaluates their perspective and achievements in life? What happens when the attitude is dictating undesirable results? How can attitudes be changed? And, if the attitudes change, what are the ramifications to other people around them?

Christ gives us a perfect example to follow. His high standard was not given to frustrate us but to reveal areas in our lives that need improvement. Whenever I study Philippians 2:3-8, I am reminded of the healthy attitude qualities that Jesus possessed. He was selfless. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (vv. 3-4).

He was secure: "Who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (vv. 6-7).

He was submissive: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by

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becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (v. 8).

Paul says that these qualities were exhibited in the life of Christ because of His attitude (v. 5). He also says that we can have this same attitude in our lives. We have a visual example of a Christ-like attitude, and we are encouraged to obtain it.

Chapter 2: The Attitude – What Is It?

Hardly a day goes by without the word "attitude" entering the conversation. It may be used as a complaint or a compliment. It can mean the difference between a promotion and a demotion. Sometimes we feel it; other times we see it. Yet it is difficult to explain.

The attitude is an inward feeling expressed through behavior. That is why an attitude can be seen without a word's being said. Haven't we all noticed the pout of the sulker or the jutted jaw of the determined? Of all the things we wear, our expressions are the most important.

Since an attitude often is expressed by our body language and facial expressions, it can be contagious. Have you noticed what happens to a group of people when one person reveals a negative attitude with his expression? Or have you noticed the lift you receive when a friend's facial expression shows love and acceptance?

Sometimes the attitude can be masked, and others who see us are fooled. But usually the cover-ups will not last long. There is a constant struggle as the attitude tries to wiggle its way out.

Psychologist and philosopher James Allen states, "You cannot travel within and stand still without." Soon, what is happening within us will affect what is happening without. A hardened attitude is a dreaded disease. It causes a closed mind and a dark future. When the attitude is positive and conducive to growth, the mind expands, and the progress begins.

Chapter 3: The Attitude – Why Is It Important?

For some, attitude presents a difficulty at every opportunity; for others it presents an opportunity in every difficulty. Some climb with a positive attitude, while others fall with a negative perspective. The very fact that the attitude "makes some" while "breaking others" is significant enough for us to explore its importance. Studying the major statements listed in this chapter will highlight this truth.

Attitude Axiom #1: Our attitude determines our approach to life. Our attitude tells us what we expect from life. Like an airplane, if our noses are pointed up, we are taking off; if they are pointed down, we are headed for a crash. We are individually responsible for our view of life. The Bible says, "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal 6:7). Our attitude and action toward life largely determine what happens to us.

Attitude Axiom #2: Our attitude determines our relationship with people. This axiom takes on a higher significance when, as Christians, we realize that effective ministry to one another is based on relationships. John 10:3-5 gives us a view of relationships upon which leadership can be built:

1. Relationships to the point of instant recognition (He calls His own sheep by name);
2. Established relationships built on trust (His sheep hear His voice and come to Him); and
3. Modeled leadership (He walks ahead of them, and they follow Him).

Yet establishing such relationships is difficult. People are funny. They want a place in the front of the bus, the back of church, and the middle of the road. Tell a man there are 300 billion stars, and he will believe you. Tell him that a bench has just been painted, and he has to touch it to be sure.

Attitude Axiom #3: Often our attitude is the only difference between success and failure. History's greatest achievements have been made by people who excelled only slightly over the masses of others in their fields. This could

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be called the “principle of the slight edge.” Many times that slight edge is attitude.

Attitude Axiom #4: Our attitude at the beginning of a task will affect its outcome more than anything else. Coaches understand the importance of their team having the right attitude before facing a tough opponent. Job seekers know that their prospective employers are looking for more than just skills when they apply for work. Why? Because the right attitude in the beginning ensures success at the end. You are acquainted with the saying, “All’s well that ends well.” An equal truth is, “All’s well that begins well.”

Attitude Axiom #5: Our attitude can turn our problems into blessings. When confronted with a difficult situation, people with outstanding attitudes make the best of it while they get the worst of it. Life can be likened to a grindstone. Whether it grinds you down or polishes you depends on what you are made of.

Attitude Axiom #6: Our attitude can give us an uncommonly positive perspective. The people whose attitude causes them to approach life from an entirely positive perspective are not always understood. They are what some would call “no-limit” people. In other words, they don’t accept the normal limitations of life like most people. They are unwilling to accept the accepted just because it is accepted. Their response to a self-limited condition will probably be a “Why?” instead of an “Okay.” They have limitations in life. Their gifts are not so plentiful that they cannot fail. But they are determined to walk to the very edge of their potential or the potential of a project before they accept a defeat.

Attitude Axiom #7: Our attitude is not automatically good just because we are Christians. It is noteworthy that the seven deadly sins are all matters of attitude, inner spirit, and motives. Sadly, many Christians carry with them inner spirit problems. They are like the elder brother of the prodigal son, thinking they do everything right. He chose to stay home with the father. No way was he going to spend his time sowing wild oats. Yet when the younger brother came

back home, some of the elder brother’s wrong attitudes began to surface. Such an “elder brother” attitude has three possible results, none of which are positive.

First, it is possible for us to assume the place and privilege of a son while refusing the obligations of a brother. Second, it is possible to serve the Father faithfully yet not be in fellowship with Him. A right relationship will usually cultivate similar interests and priorities, which the elder brother does not have with his father. Third, it is possible to be an heir of all our Father possesses yet have less joy and liberty than one who possesses nothing. The servants were happier at the son’s return than was the elder son.

A wrong attitude kept the elder brother away from the heart’s desire of the father, the love of his brother, and the joy of the servants. Wrong attitudes in our lives will block the blessings of God and cause us to live below God’s potential for our lives.

SECTION II: THE CONSTRUCTION OF YOUR ATTITUDE

Chapter 4: It’s Hard to Soar with the Eagles When You Have to Live with the Turkeys

Our surroundings control our soaring. Turkey-thinking + turkey-talk = turkey-walk. We quickly blend into the color of our surroundings. Similarities in thinking, mannerism, priorities, talk, and opinions are common within individual cultures. We all know married people who grow to look more alike as the years pass. Many times family members exhibit similar physical traits.

Unquestionably our surroundings help construct our attitudes too.

In the construction of attitudes, the influence of choices rises on the opposite side of environment. Speaking more logically than emotionally, the voice of the world says, “We are free to choose our attitudes.” This logic becomes more

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convincing with the additional voice of Victor Frankl, survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, who said, "The last of the human freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

Both environment and choice play a vital part in the construction of our attitude. However, neither can be held solely responsible for the formation of our mindset.

Chapter 5: Foundational Truths About the Construction of Attitudes

Before we look at specific things that help construct attitudes, we must understand some basic principles about attitude formation.

1. A child's formative years are the most important for installing the right attitudes. Attitudes we accept as children are usually the attitudes we embrace as adults. It is hard to get away from our early training.
2. An attitude's growth never stops. Our attitudes are formed by our experiences and how we choose to react to them. Therefore, as long as we live, we are forming, changing, and reinforcing attitudes. There is no such thing as an unalterable attitude.
3. The more our attitude grows on the same foundation, the more solid it becomes. Reinforcement of our foundational attitudes, whether positive or negative, makes them stronger.
4. Many builders help construct our attitudes at certain times and places. Certain people come into our lives at various times who help make or break our perspective.
5. There is no such thing as a perfect, flawless attitude. In other words, we all have attitudes that need remodeling.

All people encounter storms in their lives that threaten their attitudes. The secret to safe arrival is to adjust your perspective continually.

Chapter 6: Materials Used in Constructing Attitudes

As you're probably aware by this time, attitudes aren't formed automatically, and they are not shaped in a vacuum. This chapter deals with the main influences that make our attitudes what they are today. Although these materials overlap, their influence is greater at some times than at others.

We are born as distinct individuals. Even two children with the same parents, same environments, and the same training are quite different from one another. These differences contribute to the spice of life we all enjoy. A set of attitudes accompanies each personality. Generally people with certain temperaments develop specific attitudes common to that temperament.

Environment is the first influencer of our belief system. Therefore, the foundation of our attitude is laid in the environment in which we were born. Environment becomes even more significant when we realize that our earliest learned attitudes are the most difficult to change.

It is impossible to perform consistently in a manner inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. In other words, we usually act in direct response to our self-image. Nothing is more difficult to accomplish than maintaining outward actions without changing inward feelings. As we realize our performance is based on our perception of ourselves, we should also remember God's unconditional love and acceptance. He thinks more of us than we do of ourselves.

This principle works in reverse too. How we see ourselves reflects how others see us. If we like ourselves, it increases the odds that others will like us. Self-image is one of the main parameters in the construction of our attitude. We act in response to how we see ourselves. We never go beyond the boundaries that stake out around our true feelings about ourselves.

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What others indicate about their perception of us affects how we perceive ourselves. Usually we respond to the expectations of others. Mary Vaughn, in one of her case studies involving a first grader, wrote, "A poor environment physically (little clothing, shelter, or food) does not necessarily produce negative attitudes in the child. It is the lack of acceptance by peers that forms scars deep within the child." Often when I am speaking to leaders I tell them about the importance of acceptance and affirmation of the ones they are leading. The truth is that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

When I speak on attitudes, I always emphasize our need to surround ourselves with positive people. One of the saddest comments that I often hear comes from one mate who tells me the other marriage partner is negative and doesn't want to change. To a certain extent, when the negative mate does not want to change, the positive one is imprisoned by negativism. In such situations, I advise the couple to remember and return to patterns they followed in their courtship days.

Observe a couple during courtship. They are illustrating two beautiful ideas. They are building on strengths and expecting the best they can. The marriage will be good and reinforcing if the weaknesses are not emphasized. But many end up in divorce court because the strengths are ignored. The partners go from expecting the best to expecting the worst, from building on strengths to focusing on weaknesses.

Whether you are eleven, forty-two, or sixty-five, your attitude toward life is still under construction. By understanding the materials that make up the structure of your attitude, you and those you influence can maintain a healthier perspective.

Chapter 7: The Costliest Mistake People Make in Constructing an Attitude

What are a person's capabilities? No one knows. Therefore, no one should be consciously instilling life-limiting thoughts onto others. Remember: Others can stop you

temporarily, but you are the only one who can do it permanently. Often when lecturing on limitations, I talk about what I call the "sap stratum."

The sap stratum line represents our self-imposed limiting barrier. The effort it would take to break through that sap level takes the "sap" out of us. Every time we make an attempt to break through the line, there is accompanying pain. We pay a physical and emotional price when we actually break through our perceived limitation and enter a new area of further potential.

I've listed below a few comments we unthinkingly make that can limit potential and keep us from breaking through the sap strata:

- "It's never been done before."
- "I'll never try that again."
- "Take it easy."

SECTION III: THE CRASHING OF YOUR ATTITUDE

Chapter 8: Mayday! Mayday! My Attitude Is Losing Altitude

One of the first things I discovered during my ride in a small airplane was that turbulence often makes the ride a little rough. Just as flying has its rough patches, so does life. A smooth day is the exception, not the norm. Flying straight and level usually comes as a recovery from climbs, descents, and turns.

Here are some rules to remember when you have one of those terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days and your attitude starts to plummet.

Rule 1: Maintain the right attitude when the going gets tough. Our natural reaction is to bail out of the right attitude to escape our problems. During our flight of life, our

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attitude is more critical during tough times, that is, when we are tempted to panic and make bad decisions. When we crash, it comes from a wrong reaction, not the turbulence. How often have we seen the response of making a mountain out of a molehill become more dangerous than the problem itself?

Remember, difficulties really become problems when we internalize unfortunate circumstances. Another thing to remember when the weather gets rough is that what really matters is what happens in us, not to us. When the external circumstances lead to wrong internal reactions, we really have problems.

Rule 2: Realize that the rough weather will not last forever. When you're caught in the middle of tough situations, it is often difficult to remember this truth. We become consumed with the problems. Our entire outlook is colored by the present. A drowning person is not concerned about tomorrow's schedule.

There is an expression I use quite often when I sense that the difficulties of the day are overwhelming me. At the moment when I have had enough, I say: "This too shall pass!" That brief statement really works. It helps me gain perspective on my situation.

Rule 3: Try to make major decisions before the storm. There is one major difference between people who jump from one major problem to another and those who go from one major success to the next: timing.

Usually, wrong decisions are made at the wrong time, and right decisions are made at the right time. The reason? We let our environment control our thinking, which in turn controls our decisions. Therefore, the more decisions that are made in the calm moments of life, the fewer times storms can bring us down.

Rule 4: Keep in contact with the control tower. Our tendency is often to try to make it on our own. We admire that rugged, independent individual who "pulls himself up by

his bootstraps." That is the American way. Jesus sings a different song. He says, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

We talked about factors that cause us to lose altitude. The following chapters of section III are "crash causers." These are either the things that cause us to crash or the things we blame when we make uncomfortable landings.

Chapter 9: The Crash from Within

There are certain storms within a person's life that contribute to an attitude crash. The three storms I'm discussing in this chapter are predominantly inward, not outward. They are part of us and must be constructively dealt with to bring inner peace and a wholesome attitude.

The first inward storm is the fear of failure. Attitude is the determining factor of whether our failures make or break us. The persistence of a person who encounters failure is one sign of a healthy attitude. Winners don't quit! Failure becomes devastating and causes our attitude to crash. To accept failure as final is to be finally a failure.

The second storm within us that causes attitude crash is the dread of discouragement. Discouragement causes us to see ourselves as less than we really are. This becomes even more important when we realize that we cannot consistently perform in a manner that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. Discouragement causes us to evade our responsibilities. It also causes us to blame others and to blur the facts.

We are all subject to the currents of discouragement that can sweep us into a danger zone. If we know some of the causes of discouragement, we can more easily avoid it.

Discouragement comes when we:

- Feel that the opportunity for success is gone
- Become selfish
- Are not immediately successful in our attempts to do something
- Lack a purpose and a plan

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Has some upsetting defeat or discouragement come your way recently? It's up to you to decide how you will handle the defeats of life. No one will go through all of life without meeting defeat from time to time. When it happens to you, don't quit! Missionary E. Stanley Jones said that he had adopted as his motto for life, "When life kicks you, let it kick you forward!" A wise resolve! Anyone can start, but only a thoroughbred will finish.

The third storm that rages within us and causes our attitude to crash is the struggle of sin. Your attitude begins to falter when sin enters your life. A withdrawal, hardness, and flesh-oriented nature begin to invade us, all caused by sin. It is first appealing, then appalling; first alluring, then alienating; first deceiving, then damning; it promises life and produces death; it is the most disappointing thing in the world.

Understanding the problem is a good first step in correcting your perspective. If your attitude is threatening to crash, check the internal indications. See if you are afraid of failure, dealing with discouragement, or struggling with sin.

Chapter 10: The Crash from Without

Internal problems are not the only things that endanger our perspective. Our attitude sometimes crashes when the storms around us begin to take their toll. I have pinpointed four of these outward causes.

I call the first storm the closeness of criticism. I use "closeness" because the criticism that hurts always comes close to where we live or what we love. Others' criticism of us is like having someone step on our "blue suede shoes." I have learned the negative effect that criticism can have on a young church leader. People entering their calling with a dream can easily be crushed unless they understand that the best fruit is the one the birds pick.

The second storm is the presence of problems. Life is full of problems, and we might as well be prepared for them.

There is no such place as a trouble-free area and no such person as one who knows no problems. And Christians aren't exempt!

At times we all become flooded with problems. Perhaps it is the number of difficulties more than the size of any one trouble that wears us down. We all have moments when we bite off more than we can chew.

When our attitude crashes, we have two alternatives: We can either alter the difficulty or alter ourselves. What can be changed for the best we must change. When that is impossible we must adjust to the circumstances in a positive way. The third external storm that can cause our attitude to fall is the conflict of change. We resist nothing more than change. Many times we enjoy the rewards of change but endure its process. We are creatures of habit. We first form habits, and then our habits form us. We are what we repeatedly do. It is easy to see our world only from our perspective. When that occurs, we stagnate and become narrow.

The right amount of change can strengthen us. Moses uses an interesting illustration in Deuteronomy 32:11, where he describes the mother eagle's forcing her young to leave the nest and fly. The eaglet wants to stay in the nest and be fed, but if he remains there, he will never use his great wings or enjoy the heights for which he was created. So his mother has to knock him out of the nest, catch him on her wings when he falls too far, and repeat the process until he learns to fly on his own. You and I enjoy our little nests, and we have worked hard to build them. This explains why we resent it when God starts to shake up the nest. God wants us to grow.

The fourth storm, which causes more attitude fatalities than anything else, is what I call the night of negativism. Our thoughts govern our actions. The question is whether we are governed by negative or positive thoughts. As negative thoughts produce negative actions, so positive thoughts produce positive actions. Today, we are where we

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are and what we are because of the thoughts that dominate our minds. Our challenge is to think right in a negative world. Negative thinking and living do many detrimental things in our lives.

The most common type of negativism that hinders others is characterized by what I call a “flat world” statement. This is a sincere statement that has been conditioned by past education and experience. It is not true, yet is accepted as fact. Therefore, it directs the thinking and action of many individuals. To crystallize our understanding of this subtle form of negativism, I have listed some “flat world” statements:

- “Leaders are born, not made.”
- “Nice guys finish last.”
- “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.”
- “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

When we become conditioned to perceived truths and closed to new positive possibilities, the following happens:

- We see what we expect to see, not what we can see.
- We hear what we expect to hear, not what we can hear.
- We think what we expect to think, not what we can think.

SECTION IV: THE CHANGING OF YOUR ATTITUDE

Chapter 11: Up, Up, and Away

One of the great discoveries we make, one of our great surprises, is that we can do what we are afraid we can’t do. Most of the prison bars we beat against are within us; we put them there, and we can take them down. Now, that statement includes some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that we bring many of our problems on ourselves. The good news is that, beginning today, we can break out of our prison of bad attitudes and become free to live effectively.

The individual’s attitude is my major emphasis in speaking around the world. Most people are very close to becoming the person God wants them to be. Continually I say to people and now to you, “You’re only an attitude away!” My greatest joy is helping hundreds of people change an attitude they feel they are stuck with for the rest of their lives.

Most people who have negative attitudes do not realize that attitudes know no barriers. The only barriers to improving our attitudes are those we ourselves put up. Attitudes such as faith, hope, and love can cross over any obstacle. With this truth in mind, let me encourage you to take control of your attitudes and begin the needed changes.

Chapter 12: The Choice Within You

We are either the masters or the victims of our attitudes. It is a matter of personal choice. Who we are today is the result of choices we made yesterday. Tomorrow we will become what we choose today. To change means to choose change.

Choice #1 - Evaluate your present attitudes. This will take some time. If possible, try to separate yourself from your attitudes. The goal of this exercise is not to see the “bad you” but the bad attitude that keeps you from being a more fulfilled person. This evaluation helps you make key changes only when you identify the problem.

Choice #2 – Realize that faith is stronger than fear. The only thing that will guarantee the success of a doubtful undertaking is having faith from the beginning that you can do it. There is a biblical way to handle fear so that an endeavor can be successful and does not limit us. The early church in Acts was experiencing tremendous growth. However, in Acts 4, Christians came up against some stiff opposition. They were commanded to stop witnessing or suffer severe consequences. Together they withdrew to pray. Verses 29 to 31 record a process they underwent to handle their fear. As you approach changing attitudes, this formula for fear will be helpful.

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1. Understand that God sees your problems (Acts 4:29).
2. Ask to be filled with confidence and love in greater measure than your fear (Acts 4:29).
3. Believe God is working a miracle in your life (Acts 4:30).
4. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31).

You are now preparing to take a step. Don't be fearful or hesitant. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps. The future is worth the risk. Tomorrow you will look back at the changes and call them improvements.

Choice #3 – Write a statement of purpose. In order to have fun and direction in changing your attitude, you must establish a clearly stated goal. This goal should be as specific as possible, written out, and signed, with a time frame attached to it. The purpose statement should be placed in a visible spot where you see it several times a day to give you reinforcement.

Choice #4 – Have the desire to change. No choice will determine the success of your attitude change more than desiring to change. When all else fails, desire alone can keep you heading in the right direction. Many people have climbed over insurmountable obstacles to make themselves better people when they realized that a change is possible if they really want it badly enough.

As long as we have acceptable options, we will not change. There seems to be three times in our lives when we're more receptive to change. First, sometimes we hurt so much that we are forced to change. Second, receptivity to change is heightened when we are bored and become restless. Third, change is apt to occur when we realize we can change. This is the greatest motivation of all. Nothing sparks the fire of desire more than the sudden realization that you do not have to stay the same. You no longer need to feel the burden of a negative attitude. You have no valid reason to constantly feel bitter and resentful about life, others, or yourself. You can change!

Choice #5 – Live one day at a time. Anyone can fight the battle for just one day. It is only when you and I add the burdens of those two awful eternities, yesterday and tomorrow that we tremble. It is not the experiences of today that drive men to distraction; it is the remorse or bitterness for something that happened yesterday and the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Let us therefore live but one day at a time—today!

Choice #6 – Change your thought patterns. That which holds our attention determines our actions. We are where we are and what we are because of the dominating thoughts that occupy our minds. Our thought lives, not our circumstances, determine our happiness. Often I see people who are convinced that they will be happy when they attain a certain goal, and then, when they reach the goal, many times they do not find the fulfillment they anticipated.

The secret to staying on an even keel is to fill your mind with, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable...whatever is of good repute, if there is anything excellent and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil 4:8). Paul understood. What holds our attention determines our action.

Choice #7 - Develop good habits. Attitudes are nothing more than habits of thought. Habits aren't instincts; they're acquired actions or reactions. They don't just happen; they are caused. Once the original cause of a habit is determined, it is within your power to accept or reject it. Most people allow their habits to control them. When those habits are hurtful, they damage our attitudes.

Choice #8 – Continually choose to have a right attitude. Once you make the choice to possess a good attitude, the work really begins. Now comes a life of continually deciding to grow and maintain the right outlook. Attitudes have a tendency to revert back to their original patterns if not carefully guarded and cultivated.

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There are three stages of change in which you must deliberately choose the right attitude:

1. Early stage – The first few days are always the most difficult. Old habits are hard to break. The mental process must be on guard continually to provide right action.
2. Middle stage – The moment good habits begin to take root, options open that bring on new challenges. New habits are formed that will either be good or bad. The good news is: “Like begets like”; the more right choices and habits you develop, the more likely good habits will be formed.
3. Late stage – Complacency can become the enemy. We all know of incidents where someone (perhaps us) successfully lost weight, only to fall back into old eating and gain it all back.

Chapter 13: The Opportunities Around You

Once you have made the choice to change your attitude, you are ready to allow the opportunities around you to make this a decision of success.

Opportunity #1 – Enlist the cooperation of a friend. We need one another. Few people are successful unless a lot of people want them to be. Change has a tendency to intimidate us. To help overcome this feeling of inadequacy you need the help of a friend. There is a law in life that will, in time, return good for good. Therefore, enlisting someone’s help will not only assist you, it will also give a friend a blessing in return.

Opportunity #2 – Associate with the right people. A large portion of our self-image (who we conceive ourselves to be) is determined by our friendships. Accepting attitudes are based many times on how important the attitude is in complementing or damaging the image we feel other people have of us.

Birds of a feather do flock together. From friends, we acquire many of our thoughts, mannerisms, and characteristics. Changing an attitude from negative to positive often

requires changing friendships. Many times people blame circumstances for their problems. But usually it is the crowd we run with, not the circumstance we encounter, that makes the differences in our lives. Good circumstances with bad friends result in defeat; bad circumstances with good friends result in victory.

Opportunity #3 – Select a model to follow. Communicators say that ninety percent of what we learn is visual, nine percent is audio, and one percent comes through the other senses. Our dependence on the eyes to learn, no doubt, is at least partially a result of television in our culture. Visual messages last longer than those we just hear. You could select someone to follow who would give you a constant visualization of what you want to become. Making a single decision to alter an attitude is not enough. The vision of what you desire must be constantly before you. To achieve the kind of life you want, you must act, walk, talk, and conduct yourself as the ideal person that you visualize yourself to be. Gradually that old self will pass away and be replaced with the new one.

Opportunity #4 – Learn from your mistakes. You cannot control all circumstances. You cannot always make the right decisions that bring the right results. But you can always learn from your mistakes.

Opportunity #5 – Expose yourself to successful experiences. It takes five positive experiences to overcome one negative situation. When faced with the possibility of failure, our tendency is to sit back and be anxious. Fear is nature’s warning signal to get busy. We overcome fear by successful action. Nothing intimidates us more than constant exposure to failure. Nothing motivates us more than constant exposure to success. Therefore, I have found that people change more quickly if they are continually given situations in which they can be successful.

Start exposing yourself today to successful people and experiences. Read books that will make you a better per-

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son. Find something that you can do well and do it often. Help make someone who needs your spiritual gifts a better person. Feed your right attitudes, and, before you know it, your bad attitudes will starve to death. Write down your successes and review them often. Share your growth with those who are interested in you and already have excellent attitudes. Take time daily to congratulate yourself and thank others for making this change of attitude possible.

Chapter 14: The God Above You

E. Stanley Jones made an impressive point when he said, "Anything less than God will let you down." He went on to explain, "Anything less than God is not rooted in eternal reality. It has built-in failure." For every possible predicament of man, there is a corresponding grace of God. In other words: For every particular human need, there is a particular supernatural resource. For every definite problem, there is a definite answer. For every hurt, there is a cure. For every weakness, there is a strength. For every confusion, there is guidance.

There are several ways God supports and strengthens our lives while we change.

Strength #1 – God's word. When the truths of the Bible permeate our minds and hearts our attitudes can only improve. His word is filled with people who continually demonstrate that man's right relationship with God gives mankind a healthy mindset.

Strength #2 – Prayer. Many outstanding prayers in the Bible are effective yet brief. Psalm 25:1-10 is a short, simple, and sincere prayer. The psalmist, troubled from without and within, has stopped for a moment on the way. He knows he cannot turn back but scarcely knows how to continue. Therefore, he prays that God will help him follow through on his decision to stay on the right road.

Strength #3 – The Holy Spirit. Power was promised when the Holy Spirit was received. Until Pentecost, the disciples

were at best a questionable crew. Jesus knew what they needed. Therefore, He encouraged them to wait for the filling of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They waited, and they were filled. The early church was launched! The theme of this growing group of believers was "forward through the storm." Seven difficult problems confronted this New Testament church in the book of Acts. After each obstacle, we read that the church was enlarged and the Word of God multiplied. Setbacks became springboards. Obstacles were turned into opportunities. Barriers turned out to be blessings. Cowards became courageous. Why? Those within the church were filled with the Holy Spirit. That same power can be given to you.

As you desire to change and act on your plans to change, remember that you're not doing this by yourself. First John 4:4 says, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is He who is within you than he who is in the world."

You will experience that overcoming power as you remember this formula for spiritual success:

If you want to be distressed, look within.

If you want to be defeated, look back.

If you want to be distracted, look around.

If you want to be dismayed, look ahead.

If you want to be delivered, look up!

The Pastor's Perspective

Interestingly, I read this book right after reading an article in Inc. Magazine titled, "Listening to Complainers Is Bad for Your Brain." Listening to negative comments actually affects your hippocampus, the part of your brain that is involved in problem solving. As one friend said, too much complaining turns your brain to mush. Attitude matters.

I was particularly struck by Maxwell's comments on how

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important attitude is at the beginning of a project: "All's well that begins well." I've often challenged people to start strong when they are pursuing the goals they have set; I haven't always made the connection explicitly with choosing our attitude at the same time. I think I'm going to adapt my challenge.

I'm still thinking about the underlying theme, that we can choose our attitude. Generally I believe that, but I'm wondering what, if any, limits there are on that. I suspect Victor Frankl would suggest that there aren't. But I've seen many people over the years who seemed to try sincerely to change their attitudes and weren't able to or didn't seem to be able to maintain it. Is that because they didn't really try, or was there a limit they really couldn't get past?

What do you think? Any other thoughts on Maxwell's book? Click [here](#) and post your thoughts. Let's grow together.

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