

WHEN YOUR ATTITUDE IS LOSING ALTITUDE 1 KINGS 19:3-18; JOHN 15:4-7

When was the last time you had a really bad day? Judith Viorst wrote a great children's book about a little boy entitled Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Today, I'm concluding a brief series of messages on the importance of godly attitudes entitled "Do You Need An Attitude Adjustment?" Alexander had his share of attitudinal challenges. He explains, "I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell **it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day**. At breakfast Anthony found a Corvette Stingray car kit in his breakfast cereal box and Nick found a junior Undercover Agent code ring in his breakfast cereal box, but in my cereal box all I found was breakfast cereal. I think I'll move to Australia."

"At school Mrs. Dickens liked Paul's picture of the sailboat better than my picture of the invisible castle. At singing time, she said I sang too loud. At counting time, she said I left out sixteen. Who needs sixteen? I could tell **it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day**. I could tell because Paul said I wasn't his best friend anymore. He said that Philip Parker was his best friend, and that Albert Moyo was his next best friend and that I was only his third best friend. 'I hope you sit on a tack,' I said to Paul.... There were two cupcakes in Philip Parker's lunch bag and Albert got a Hershey bar with almonds and Paul's mother gave him a piece of a jelly roll that had little coconut sprinkles on top. Guess whose mother forgot to put in dessert? **It was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.**"

"That's what it was because after school my mom took us all to the dentist and Dr. Fields found a cavity in me. 'Come back next week and I'll fix it,' said Dr. Fields. I said, 'Next week I'm going to Australia.' So then we went to the shoe store to buy some sneakers. Anthony chose white ones with blue stripes. Nick chose red ones with white stripes. I chose blue ones with red stripes, but then the shoe man said, 'We're all sold out of those.' They made me buy the plain old white ones, but they can't make me wear them. When we picked up my dad at his office he said I couldn't play with his copying machine, but I forgot. He also said to watch out for the book on his desk, and I was as careful as I could be except for my elbow. He also said, 'Don't fool around with the phone,' but I think I called Australia. My dad said please don't pick him up anymore. **It was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day**. There were lima beans for supper and I hate limas. There was kissing on TV and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot. I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad pajamas. I hate my railroad pajamas. **It was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day**. My mom says some days are like that. Even in Australia."

There's a kid whose attitude has definitely lost all of its altitude. In fact, it's crashed and burned! More than anyone on the planet, followers of Jesus have the most reasons and the best reasons to have great attitudes consistently. Our attitudes should be flying high all the time! But you now as well as I do that many times our attitudes lose altitude and crash. What are the storms that threaten the altitude of our attitudes?

FLYING THROUGH LIFE'S INNER STORMS.

Many of the storms we experience in life – the ones that threaten the altitude of our attitudes - are inside of us. Let's call the first one what it is: the fear of failure. What's the old saying? "If at first you don't succeed, destroy all the evidence that you even tried!" Failure – we hide it, deny it, ignore it, hate it, rationalize it – do just about everything but admit or accept it. But the fact is that failure is a necessary step to success. It's impossible to succeed in life without making some mistakes. Most of us – myself included – are overly concerned with survival, security, and maintaining the status quo in every area of our lives. Douglas MacArthur, the great World War 2 general, once said, "There is no security in life, only opportunity." Being able to maintain a godly, positive, inner attitude is often the determining factor as to whether a failure in your life makes you or breaks you.

You know who had godly, tough, inner attitudes? Paul, the great Christian leader. Here was a man with a difficult past. He persecuted and killed Christians until he met Jesus for himself in a vision. Many of the first Christians didn't trust Paul or the authenticity of his conversion. Would you? As a follower of Jesus committed to telling others about Jesus everywhere, no one faced more opposition and persecution than Paul. From prison he wrote, "I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us." (Ph 3:13-14 NLT) Paul realized the greatest danger in life is to risk nothing. When you risk nothing, you do nothing, have nothing, and become nothing. I admit I don't like failure any more than anyone else. I appreciate this observation: fear of failure grips those who take themselves too seriously. Ouch! So what if I fail? So what if you fail? By God's grace, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move on in your life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's another inner storm that can threaten the altitude of your attitudes: the dread of discouragement. Do you remember the Old Testament prophet, Elijah? Right after God used him to achieve a tremendous victory over idolatry, Elijah became very discouraged. The people of Israel didn't just return to the Lord in masse. The evil queen, Jezebel, wasn't overthrown. Turn with me to 1 Kings 19 and let's observe a case study in discouragement. Verse four reveals the depth of Elijah's discouragement. He wanted to die. Verse nine underlines the fact that when you're discouraged, you withdraw – from people, from responsibility, and from life itself. Verses ten and fourteen reveal that when we get discouraged, we tend to blame others, blur the facts, and exaggerate. Elijah thought he alone was faithful to God, but look at what God says in verse eighteen. There were at least 7,000 people in Israel who didn't worship idols. Now Elijah was a spiritual giant, to be sure, but even he was susceptible to discouragement. Let's face it, discouragement can do a number on you and me!

What can you do to defeat discouragement? Start off with godly action. What comes first – godly action or godly attitudes? When you're flying through the storm of discouragement, I've learned that you've got to act your way into a new way of feeling instead of feeling your way into a new way of acting. I've learned that principle kind of

by accident. Occasionally, I will have what I call “1,000 Miles Away Sundays.” What’s that? Something happened earlier that week that left me discouraged. I feel down and empty. It may have had nothing to do with the church at all. But whatever the cause, I wish I was 1,000 miles away from here on a Sunday morning. But I still have to show up, right? I can’t just hop in the car and drive 1,000 miles away literally. I’ve learned the best cure for “1,000 Miles Away Sundays” is to turn up and push through the discouragement, preach through it, and reach out to others through it. When you’re discouraged, take some godly action – do something just because you love Jesus or reach out and help someone else in His Name. Give yourself even more to the worship of God – sing the songs even louder, find an encouraging Scripture and pray it, remind yourself why God is great and thank Him for it.

“But, Rick, I just don’t feel like it!” So what? Are you going to be the master of your attitudes or their victim? Engage in some godly thinking. Remind yourself of who God is and what He has done. God loves you. God sent Jesus so you can have an eternal relationship with Him. You’re precious to Him. He has a plan and a purpose for your life. One of my favorite Bible promises says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the LORD. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’” (Jer 29:11 NLT) Great attitudes are one result of thinking rightly about God.

Another way to defeat discouragement is by meditating on godly examples. The Bible is full of people just like you and me who hung in there with God despite the very worst life could throw at them. Read their stories and get encouraged. Read the biographies of great Christians through the centuries. Every one of them had very discouraging events in their lives, but they kept on being faithful to God. There are people in this very room who are wonderful, godly examples of just hanging in there with God despite severe discouragements. Talk to them. Let them tell you their stories. Take godly action, engage in some godly thinking, and meditate on godly examples. Those are the best ways to break the power of discouragement. E. Stanley Jones, a great missionary from the last century, put it well, “When life kicks you, let it kick you forward.”

A third inner storm can certainly cause your attitudes to lose altitude: - our struggle with sin. The moment you surrender your life to Jesus as Savior and Lord, He delivers you from sin’s penalty – Hell for all eternity – right then and there. But sin’s power isn’t removed then and there. We still have to resist sin’s temptations until the day we die. On the one hand, God wants you to take this struggle with sin very seriously and realize that experiencing victory over it will be gradual rather than immediate. On the other hand, God doesn’t want you to excuse or rationalize sin away ever. No follower of Jesus has to sin. The Bible says, “Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.” (Rom 6:12-13 NLT) The Holy Spirit will show where sin has a stronghold in your life. He will give you the power to break sin’s grip on your life, if you want to be free.

Here's a couple of simple truths that help me in my personal struggle with sin. One, keep short accounts with God. In other words, don't let unconfessed sin just pile up inside of you like a stack of unpaid bills. As soon as the Holy Spirit puts His finger on an ungodly attitude or ungodly behavior, confess it, ask the Lord for His forgiveness, and move on. Two, don't let the devil spew condemnation into your life. He's very good at whispering into our hearts, "God can't possibly forgive you for doing *that*. Some kind of a Christian you are!" God understands our struggle with sin. That's exactly why He sent Jesus to the cross - because He understood better than any of us - the ongoing power of sin. No sin is unforgivable if you will sincerely confess it and turn away from it. Inner storms can certainly cause your attitudes to lose altitude. But so can outer storms.

FLYING THROUGH LIFE'S OUTER STORMS

Here's a troubling one: the closeness of criticism. If it was possible for someone you've never met to criticize you personally, chances are it would have little effect on you. But when criticism is close to us, it hurts the most: people you live with, people you work with, and people you worship with, for example. Sure, some criticism is justified and we can learn from it. But most criticism is just plain hurtful. Did you ever stop to think that Jesus - who was and is perfect in every way - was criticized and misunderstood continually? He was accused of being a party animal and a drunk. He was criticized for associating with people who had bad reputations. Some of His enemies even considered Jesus to be demon-possessed. What can you do when people criticize you unjustly? For starters, you can steadfastly refuse to resent them. Remember what Jesus said, "You have heard the law that says, "Love your neighbor" and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.'" (Mt 5:43-44, 46-47 NLT)

Another troublesome outer storm in life is just the presence of problems. Can you think of even one character in the Bible greatly used of God who did not have problems? Again, Paul might be the best example. He's probably the greatest follower of Jesus this world has ever known, but he endured major problems. What storms he had to fly through! But just listen to his attitudes in this Bible passage. "We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder.... Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us." (2 Cor 4:8-9, 11 MSG)

I discovered in my study a little acrostic that reminds me of how to look at problems from a godly perspective. First of all, problems are predictors. They help to mold your future, because either you shape the problem or the problem shapes you. Then, problems are reminders. Of what? We aren't self-sufficient. We all need God desperately. The Bible says, "God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him." (Ps 46:1 MSG) Problems are opportunities. Last week we discussed ruts. A

problem might help you get out of a sinful or unhealthy rut quicker than anything else and enable you to find God's solution. Problems can turn out to be blessings. God can use them to open new doors in your life to walk through. God's Word says, "Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way." (Jam 1:2-4 MSG) Problems are lessons. Precisely because they're challenging they teach you new things about God, about life, and about yourself. Problems are everywhere. Not one person is exempt from them. There's no place and no time when you'll be free of them, so trust God to use them to accomplish His greater purpose in your life. Problems are messages. God can use them to get through to you or warn you of a potentially greater disaster you can avoid. Finally, problems are solvable. Because of Jesus, every problem has a solution. Where does the Bible make that promise? "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Ph 4:13 NLT)

You might call a third kind of outer storm the conflict of change. Quite honestly, I don't like change much more than anyone else. I can identify with the elderly gentleman who was celebrating his 100th birthday. A reporter interviewed him and commented, "I'll bet you've seen lots of changes in your 100 years." The old man crossed his arms, jutted his jaw out, and said with some indignation, "Yes, and I've been against every one of them!" Here's something hard to admit, but true, nonetheless. Change is essential for growth. Did you know that God Himself authorizes change? It's written into every atom of the universe. God says in His Word, "Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands." (Is 43:18-19 MSG) Life is about change. And with all of life's changes come new opportunities for becoming more of who and what the Lord wants us to be. Followers of Jesus can welcome change and not fear it because what really matters in this life and for eternity never changes. Here's the foundation: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Heb 13:8 NLT) Both inner and outer storms can cause our attitudes to lose altitude. Here's a few final thoughts about...

FLYING THROUGH ANY OF LIFE'S STORMS.

Whenever flying through life gets tough because of all the storms out there, fight hard to maintain a godly attitude. God is never honored when we just give in to being discouraged, indifferent, critical, resistant to change, fearful, or full of doubt. I heard about a wall plaque I probably need to find and hang up where I can see it every day of my life. It simply says, "I will not give the devil one day of satisfaction by being discouraged." Do you have that kind of resolve when it comes to discouragement or any other ungodly attitude that you can be tempted to indulge in?

Considering that imagery of flying through storms, remember that rough weather doesn't last forever. I'm just going to throw the Bible at you lovingly. You can take those precious words and apply them to yourself in whatever way the Holy Spirit directs.

“So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” (Gal 6:9 NLT) Or how about this passage? “Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.... Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up.” (Heb 12:1-3 NLT) Hang in there. Endure. Persevere. Persist. Don’t ever give up.

Another thought about flying through storms: make major decisions only in good weather if possible. Ups and down are inevitable in your life and mine. Storms happen. It’s too easy to make bad decisions when you’re going through a bad storm. Get through it and then consider your options. My mom gave me a piece of sound advice I’ve never forgotten, “Don’t reconsider in the dark what God has shown you in the light.” A final thought about flying through life’s storms: keep in constant contact with the control tower. It’s a good thing when you consciously recognize your need for God and make every effort to stay as close to Him as possible. So, pray. Meditate on God’s Word. Seek the counsel of godly people. In John 15, Jesus used a different image that underlines the very same truth. He compared Himself to a grape vine and His followers – you and me – to branches coming off that vine. Please turn with me to that part of God’s Word in closing today. It’s inevitable. The closer our connection with Jesus day in and day out, the better our attitudes. The more contact we keep with the control tower - God above – the higher altitude our attitudes will fly – even in the midst of life’s storms.

Jim Stovall is a motivational speaker and a follower of Jesus. He became totally blind at the age of 29. Forget just any old storm - that would rank as a hurricane in anyone’s life. While he still had partial vision, he volunteered at a school for the blind. He was assigned to help a 4 year old boy who was blind and severely handicapped. Jim spent considerable time trying to convince this little boy he could tie his own shoes or even climb stairs despite his limitations. “No, I can’t” the boy would insist. “Yes, you can,” Jim replied. “No, I can’t. Yes, you can.” The verbal battle continued on. Meanwhile, Jim fought his own limitations. Because of his deteriorating vision, he decided he had to quit his college courses. On his way to withdraw from college, he passed the school for the blind and decided to resign his volunteer position there as well. “It’s just too tough,” he explained to the person at the desk. “I can’t do it.” But just then, he heard a little voice beside him say, “Yes, you can.” It was the 4 year old boy who had steadfastly refused to tie his own shoes. “No, I can’t,” said Jim with conviction. “Yes, you can.” Jim realized at that moment that if he gave up, this kid would give up, too. So, he stayed in college and graduated 3 and ½ years later. The week he graduated, his little friend from the school for the blind tied his shoes and climbed a flight of stairs by himself for the first time.

God Himself says we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. Our attitudes don’t have to lose altitude. You and I can fly through any of life’s storms because of Him.