

The Development of Our Attitude Philippians 4:10-13

Last week we began a five part series on attitude. We talked about the importance of attitude. Chuck Swindoll stresses the importance of attitude this way. He says, “The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens and 90 percent how we respond to it. I believe the single most significant decision I can make on a day-to-day basis is my choice of attitude.”

I can’t emphasize enough how important attitude is. Our attitude will determine whether we will have a good life, a “so-so” life, or a bad life. To have the BEST life, you and I need to have a Christ-like attitude (see Phil. 2:3-8).

The person with a Christ-like attitude: 1) does things for the right reasons, 2) is humble, 3) recognizes the importance of others, 4) is willing to serve others, and 5) demonstrates obedience to God.

This morning we’re going to talk about attitude development. We’re going to look at some factors that influence the formation of our attitudes. But before we do this, I’d like to give you five basic principles of attitude development.

First, a child’s formative years (the early years of development) are most important for instilling the right attitude.

Generally speaking, the attitudes we accept as children are the attitudes we embrace as adults. Proverbs 22:6 says, Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” [Proverbs are statements that are generally true.] What we learn and accept as children becomes part of us. The attitudes we develop early in life are difficult to change.

Second, an attitude never stops growing. It may not change, but it keeps growing. Our attitudes are formed by our experiences and how we chose to react to them. Therefore, as long as we live, we are forming, changing, or reinforcing attitudes. There is no such thing as an unalterable attitude. The attitudes we develop early in life CAN be changed. We CAN change. It’s all about choice.

Third, the more our attitude is built on the same foundation, the more solid it becomes. The longer we maintain a particular attitude, the harder it is for us to change that attitude. Reinforcement of our foundational attitudes (it doesn’t matter if they are positive or negative) makes them stronger.

Fourth, from time to time we come in contact with people who greatly affect (either in a positive or negative way) our attitude. A few weeks ago I read a story about a middle-aged woman who had terrible self-esteem. During her junior year in high school her English teacher took a short essay she wrote, put in on the blackboard, and tore it apart in front of the class. The girl was humiliated and felt stupid. She never forgot that incident. One teacher in one day affected her self-image (her attitude about herself) for a lifetime.

Fifth, there is no such thing as a flawless attitude. The only person to walk the planet with a perfect attitude was Jesus. We can all use an attitude adjustment. We can all improve on our attitude. Like I said before it’s all about choice.

Now that we’ve talked about the basic principles of attitude development, let’s look at the main factors that influence the formation of our attitude. Before we look at specific factors, I’m going to list all of them and point out when they have the greatest influence on our attitudes.

Age:	Greatest Influence:
Birth	personality, environment
Age 1-6	adult acceptance/affirmation, expressions
Age 6-10	self-image exposure to new experiences
Age 11-21	association with peers physical appearance
Age 21 ...	marriage, family job

Now that we've seen the big picture, let's talk briefly about each specific factor that influences the formation of our attitude.

Personality is first on the list. Personality is who we are. We're all born as distinct individuals. No two people are the same. Even two children with the same parents, same environment, and same training are different. These differences contribute to the "spice of life" we all enjoy. If all people were the same, if all people had similar personalities, life would be boring (perhaps simple, but certainly boring).

Each personality is accompanied by a set of attitudes. In general people with certain temperaments develop attitudes common to that temperament. In his book Spirit Controlled Temperament, Tim LaHaye maintains that there are four basic temperaments: 1) choleric – this person exhibits attitudes of perseverance and aggressiveness, 2) sanguine – this person is generally positive and looks at the bright side of life, 3) melancholy – this person can be negative at times, and 4) phlegmatic – this person exhibits an "easy come, easy go" attitude. LaHaye believes that our personality is composed of a mixture of these four basic temperaments.

Next is environment. Environment is what's around us. In my opinion our environment has a greater impact on our attitude development than our personality. Environment is the first thing that influences our belief system. As children grow they continue to pick up priorities, attitudes, interests, and philosophies from their environment. Environment becomes even more significant when we realize that the attitudes we accept as children are the most difficult to change.

Environment can and does influence our attitudes. The good news is that with Jesus there is hope in even the worst environment.

The next factor on our list is adult acceptance/affirmation. This has to do with how we feel.

Let's take a walk down memory lane. This will be a long walk for some of us, but think back to your school days. Who was your favorite teacher? And why was this person your favorite teacher? Your favorite teacher was probably the one who accepted and affirmed you.

We often forget what our teachers tried to teach us, but we seldom forget how much they cared about us. Every teacher, pastor, parent, and leader needs to understand that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Most of the psychological problems that children have stem from their lack of acceptance/affirmation from parents and peers. Parents one of the greatest gifts that you can give to your children is the gift of acceptance/affirmation, and I encourage you to do

this often. No one has ever been told too many times that he/she is important, loved, and appreciated.

The next factor on the list is expressions – what we hear. We're all familiar with the saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Don't you believe it! The inward pain of hurtful words remains long after the bruises have disappeared and the physical pain is gone. My guess is that each one of us remembers a childhood experience that hurt deeply because of someone's words.

I'll never forget what one of my English teachers told me in high school. He said, "Kuehner, you're a bum. You're never going to amount to anything!" Had I continued on the road I was on – alcohol and drug abuse – the teacher would have been right. I'm thankful that with God's help I made a liar out of him. But to this day I remember that teacher's words. Words are powerful – more powerful than sticks and stones – and they have a lasting affect on our lives.

Next is self-image. Self-image is how we see ourselves. It is impossible to consistently perform in a manner that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. There's a strong connection between how we feel and how we act. We usually act in direct response to our self-image.

One of the best ways to improve how you feel about yourself is to get some "success" under your belt. Look for things you like to do, things your good at, and then do those things. This "success" will boost your self-image.

How we feel about and see ourselves also reflects how others feel about and see us. If we feel good about ourselves in a godly way, it increases the odds that others will feel good about us too.

The next factor on the list is exposure to new experiences – opportunities for growth. Nothing in life causes more stress, yet at the same time provides more opportunity for growth, than new experiences. Parents should expose their children to new positive experiences that will build good and godly self-image and confidence. And children need continual reassurance and praise when their new experiences are negative. The worse the experience the more encouragement children need. A good formula to adopt is: experience + teaching application x love = growth.

The next factor on the list is association with peers – those who influence us. In his book Life is Tremendous, Charles Jones says, "What you will become in five years will be determined by what you read and who you associate with." Be careful who you hang out with.

Casey Stengel, former manager of the New York Yankees, understood the importance of associating with the right kind of people. When Billy Martin was in his rookie season as a manager, Casey gave him this advice. He said, "Billy, there will be fifteen players on your team who will run through a wall for you, five who will hate you, and five who are undecided about how they feel." [Kinda like the way you guys feel about your pastor ...except for the hate part. You're a Christian ...you're not allowed to hate.] After Casey said this to Billy, he went on to say, "When you make out your rooming list, always room your losers (those who hate you) together. Never room a good guy with a loser. The losers will blame the manager for everything, but it won't spread if you keep them isolated."

Let me clarify this idea of isolating ourselves from people who "drag us down." You might be asking, "Shouldn't we try to help people who have bad attitudes?" The answer

is, “Yes, we should.” But if their influence on US is greater than our influence on THEM, if they’re hurting US more than we’re helping THEM, we need to back off. Again, be careful who you hang out with. I Corinthians 15:33 says, “Don’t be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.”

The next factor on the list is physical appearance – how we look. Our looks play an important role in the formation of our attitude.

Here in America incredible pressure is put on people to have the “in look” and Hollywood dictates what’s in. Unfortunately, many people – especially teenage girls – base their worth on how well they measure up to Hollywood’s standards.

Just a word on “looking good” – I believe we ought to do our best to “look good” – I do. But we need to remember that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” If the people you love most are happy with the way you look and you’re happy with the way you look, then you look good. Celebrate who you are and whose you are!

The final factor on the list is the marriage, family, and job factor. New influences begin to affect our attitude as we approach the mid-twenties. This is a time when many people decide to get married. Obviously this is an important decision. It’s important because the person you marry will have a great influence on your perspective – how you see things. This is why a believer should never marry an unbeliever (see 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Most marriages begin on a positive note. Both husband and wife emphasize strengths and expect the best. Unfortunately, this good attitude often changes as time goes on. Spouses go from expecting the best to expecting the worst; from emphasizing strengths to emphasizing weaknesses. It used to be “Victoria’s Secret.” But now it’s “Fruit of the Loom.” It used to be, “You take my breath away.” Now it’s, “You suffocate me.” When a marriage reaches this point it has a negative affect on both partners.

What people with a marriage like this need to do is go back to the positive attitude they had when they first got married. Can you imagine how many marriages would be saved, how many good marriages there would be, if partners would continue to expect the best and emphasize strengths? It can happen. It’s all a matter of choice.

These are the major factors that influence the formation of our attitude. Hopefully this discussion has given us a better understanding of how and why we developed our attitudes. Before we conclude, I’d like to mention one more thing about attitude development. I’d like to talk about a costly mistake people make in forming their attitudes.

Far too often people allow others to put a lid on their potential. Too many people grow up selling themselves short because someone at some time filled their mind with life-limiting thoughts.

For decades track enthusiasts declared that no one would ever break the four-minute mile. A man named Roger Bannister refused to listen to these limiting statements and did what was considered impossible. Since that time hundreds of runners have broken the four-minute mile.

Listen carefully. Others can stop you temporarily, but you are the only one who can do it permanently.

If you’ve been to the circus, you may have noticed that the elephants (when they’re not in the act) are chained to stakes. Elephants are strong animals. They could easily pull those stakes out of the ground. But they don’t. Do you know why? Because when the elephants were young and weak, they were chained to stakes they couldn’t move.

They tried to break loose but couldn't. Eventually the elephants quit trying to break free. No matter how big and strong the elephant gets, he continues to think that he can't break free from the stake.

Unfortunately, there are some Christians who think and act like circus elephants. They fall way short of what they could be and do because at some point in time someone "tied them to a stake" – some one, somewhere, somehow put a lid on their potential. Children of God, it's time for us to grab hold of our chains and pull those stakes out of the ground! It's time for us to believe AND act on the great truth that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength (see Phil. 4:13)! Are you with me?