

## LESSON 12

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# Improving Your Attitude

Tennis player Andre Agassi, in a television commercial promoting a particular soft drink, states that “attitude is everything.” In a very real sense, he is right. You cannot control much of what happens in this world, but you can control your attitude at all times. No matter what happens, you make the choice to have a good or a bad attitude. Your attitude can affect the attitudes of those around you. Attitudes are contagious.

The Bible speaks to the issue of attitudes. The apostle Paul writes, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

## LESSON OUTLINE

Good Versus Bad Attitudes  
The Cause of Bad Attitudes  
Bad Attitudes to Avoid  
The Danger of Bad Attitudes  
Christlike Attitudes

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Explain the difference between good and bad attitudes.*
2. *Identify factors that lead to bad attitudes.*
3. *List bad attitudes that should be avoided.*
4. *Discuss the danger of bad attitudes.*
5. *Explain why having Christlike attitudes is important.*

### **Good Versus Bad Attitudes**

#### **Objective 1:**

*Explain the difference between good and bad attitudes.*

Attitude is “an enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object or issue” (Colman 2006). Attitude is the way you act or react, thereby showing those around you what you are thinking or feeling. Attitude is more than a temporary or momentary thought or feeling. It is a persistent frame of mind or long-standing feeling.

Although no one can control everything that happens in life, we can control our own attitudes. No matter what anyone else says or does, you choose how you respond. We all have attitudes—some good and some bad. It is important to know whether a particular attitude is good or bad. The simplest way to differentiate between good and

bad attitudes might be to ask this question: “Is my attitude beneficial or detrimental to me or to others?” If the attitude you are displaying is beneficial to yourself or to others, then it is a good attitude. Bad attitudes discourage you and/or others. Bad attitudes can be changed, however, through godly persuasion. God can persuade us through our personal reading of His Word, through a sermon, or through other means.

## The Cause of Bad Attitudes

### *Objective 2:*

*Identify factors that lead to bad attitudes.*

The first step toward controlling and keeping your attitude good is identifying the factors that lead to bad attitudes. These factors are either internal or external.

### Internal Factors

Internal factors are tendencies within you that cause bad attitudes. Maybe you have a short temper; you get angry quickly without thinking through a situation. James advises, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19–20).

It could be that you are temperamental. You feel fine one moment, and the next moment your attitude becomes offensive. Maybe you are not well physically, and that is causing you to have a bad attitude about life. One’s physical condition can and does affect one’s mental disposition. In psychological terms, this is called “psychosomatic,” which simply means there is a strong connection between what we think and how we feel.

### External Factors

External factors are things outside of you that cause bad attitudes. Possibly the way a co-worker does his or her job bothers you. You probably would not always agree with the way your boss wants you to do your work, but if you let that bother you it can develop into a bad attitude toward

him or her. Or maybe a relationship you have with someone is not going well. Sometimes parents and children have strained relationships. Spouses have difficult periods in their marriage. Even clergymen and parishioners do not always agree on everything. How these very important relationships are going can and will affect you.

Even bad weather can trigger a negative attitude in people. Whatever it is, you do not have control over external factors. Yet you still have control over your reaction to those factors. So, make it a daily practice to ask God for help to manage your attitudes.

## Bad Attitudes to Avoid

### *Objective 3:*

*List bad attitudes that should be avoided.*

The following bad attitudes are not the only possible bad attitudes that exist, but they represent the most common ones. See if any of these bad attitudes apply to you. Be honest.

### Know It All

The *know-it-all* attitude is a common bad attitude that causes people to avoid the offender. Even if you are knowledgeable, it is not always good to continuously share everything you know. Remember that others may know a lot about a particular subject also. It is possible that you can learn something new from others if you give them the chance to share. When you behave as though you know it all, you offend and insult people. Your attitude affects others! The know-it-all attitude is detrimental to the well-being of others.

Note what the Bible says: “No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it” (Ecclesiastes 8:17). In other words, no one knows everything. So we should never think we know or pretend we know all things.

## It's Not My Fault!

The *it's-not-my-fault* attitude is another prevalent bad attitude to avoid. It is easy to blame others when the problem is your own fault. Taking responsibility for your own mistakes or faults is an important step to becoming Christlike. And do not forget that some things happen that are no one's fault. Life on this earth is not perfect. Always looking for someone or something to blame is detrimental to you and to others. New Testament writer Jude speaks to a similar issue: "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage" (Jude 16).

## It Can't Be Done

Imagine how many wonderful things would not have been invented if the inventors believed that their projects or discoveries were impossible. For example, we would not have electricity, air travel, the combustion engine, the printing press, computers, and so many more conveniences. The *it-can't-be-done* attitude is a defeatist attitude. You are defeated when you are unwilling to try something new. But God encourages us to attempt great things for Him.

## Woe Is Me

The *woe-is-me* attitude is one of self-pity. This attitude causes you to see everything from a negative point of view. It is normal for things to go wrong at some point. However, when you always feel that everyone is out to destroy you, you are living below the standard God desires for you. Furthermore, comparing yourself to someone else will usually cause wrong attitudes. Either you have self-pity because someone's life is better than yours, or you feel superior because you have it easier than someone else. Both attitudes are bad.

Each person must rejoice in whom God has made him or her to be. God does all things well. Genesis 1:31 tells us, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

## You Can't Trust Anyone These Days!

The *you-can't-trust-anyone-these-days* attitude is more prevalent today than we might want to believe. Within the body of Christ are many well-meaning but misled people who have caused others to mistrust people in general. This has created an epidemic of insecurity in the church and in the world. It is appropriate to have a healthy attitude of caution when it comes to trusting people, especially strangers, but it is unhealthy to distrust everyone. Jesus assured His disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). God will never let you down. His Word is full of promises you can trust. There are also many wonderful people you can trust because they live according to God's Word.

## They Are All That Way!

Having a *they-are-all-that-way* attitude is unacceptable for Christians. Many times prejudice is imperceptible to us, but others can see it in us quickly. It is important to remember that God created and loves everyone. Therefore, we are to love all people, regardless of their ethnic, racial, religious, physical, or social differences. The New Testament tells us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; and Galatians 5:14). Jesus said it simply: "This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:17).

## The Problem Is Far Worse Than You Think

*The-problem-is-far-worse-than-you-think* attitude is one of exaggeration. Exaggeration is making something out to be more than it is. The Bible tells us that "a truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies" (Proverbs 12:17). As a Christian, you are required to be honest, not given to exaggeration. Jesus said that our communication should be straight-forward: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37).

## The Danger of Bad Attitudes

### *Objective 4:*

*Discuss the danger of bad attitudes.*

Just as wind and rain can cause damage to your home or your church building, bad attitudes damage important aspects of your life. Following are a few instances of the impact of bad attitudes.

### Damaged Relationships

When you have a bad attitude you will likely cause damage to relationships with people you care about. Proverbs 17:9 notes that “he who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” Bad attitudes can cause serious problems like abuse and divorce in a marriage. They also cause serious damage to children by setting a poor example that these children later perpetuate in their own relationships. A bad attitude can cause you to lose your job or fail to get employment in the first place. Bad attitudes can also diminish your joy, as people tend to avoid a negative person. Bad attitudes damage any relationship, including your relationship with God.

### Reduced Effectiveness

Many churches are hindered in their efforts to share the gospel and grow steadily because of lack of unity. Few, if any, visitors will stay in a church that is not loving and united. To maintain unity takes more than just human effort. It takes willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul urges us to strive for unity: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3).

Fortunately, it is not too late to change. The first step is to recognize and turn away from those ways of thinking that you now recognize as unhealthy and wrong. This is repentance. The Bible says, “Godly sorrow brings

repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Ask the Lord to forgive you, and trust Him to renew your mind. When you are tempted to return to your old way of thinking, refuse to do it. Prepare to think and act differently.

## Christlike Attitudes

### *Objective 5:*

*Explain why having Christlike attitudes is important.*

A Christlike attitude is an attitude of love for God and others. ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself”” (Matthew 22:37–39). Your love for God will direct your love for others. John writes, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19–21).

Christ showed His love for His Father in many ways. John quotes Jesus: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus was concerned about doing the will of His Father. “Here I am, I have come to do your will” (Hebrews 10:9). And He was concerned about God’s Word. Jesus showed this when He prayed for all believers, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

### Developing Christlike Attitude

Although rules for every specific detail of life are not given in Scripture, guidelines and principles for you to live by are in the Bible. Scripture is your best source for having a Christlike attitude. The best way to learn what God’s Word says on any given subject is to read it, study it and think about it. King David wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the

laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word" (Psalm 119:11–16).

Another aid in developing good attitude is to submit to a Christlike mentor. This mentor could be a friend, family member, pastor or an elder in your church. The apostle Paul encourages mentoring. He urged the Corinthian believers: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul also exhorted Timothy, "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). We are all called by God to follow the example of His Son, Jesus Christ. "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

Surely, the difference between a good and a bad attitude is not difficult to understand. It is vital for you as a believer to cultivate good attitudes through the continual application of God's Word, through prayer, and through emulating Christians who exhibit godly attitudes.

## SUGGESTED BIBLE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 119:11

Matthew 22:37–39

John 15:17

Ephesians 4:22–24

James 1:19–20

**SELF-TEST**

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *What is an attitude?*
  - a) *The soft drink Andre Agassi likes*
  - b) *A control issue*
  - c) *The way you behave that shows how you feel or think*
2. *A short temper is an example of what type of factor that causes bad attitudes?*
  - a) *Internal*
  - b) *External*
  - c) *Uncontrollable*
3. *Which of the following is not an attitude to avoid?*
  - a) *Know it all*
  - b) *Rejoice in the Lord always*
  - c) *It's not my fault*
4. *In managing our attitudes, it is important to know that*
  - a) *we cannot control our attitudes.*
  - b) *not everyone has bad attitudes.*
  - c) *we can control our own attitudes.*
5. *James advises that everyone should be*
  - a) *slow to listen.*
  - b) *quick to judge.*
  - c) *quick to listen.*
6. *Unwillingness to try new things*
  - a) *is a bad attitude that should be avoided.*
  - b) *indicates an attitude of victory.*
  - c) *is the reason for today's technological advancement.*
7. *Godly sorrow produces*
  - a) *only regret.*
  - b) *repentance.*
  - c) *guilt alone.*

8. *Who would not be a godly mentor?*
  - a) *Your pastor*
  - b) *A Christian friend*
  - c) *An unbeliever*
9. *Bad attitudes affect us by*
  - a) *increasing our effectiveness.*
  - b) *damaging our relationships.*
  - c) *stimulating our joy.*
10. *What is not a good way to develop Christlike attitude?*
  - a) *Praying to God*
  - b) *Memorizing Scripture*
  - c) *Being unloving*

## ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (12.1)
2. *a* (12.2)
3. *b* (12.3)
4. *c* (12.1)
5. *c* (12.2)
6. *a* (12.3)
7. *b* (12.4)
8. *c* (12.5)
9. *b* (12.4)
10. *c* (12.5)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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