Attitude

by Charles Swindoll

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think, say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes"

Our Great Encourager

Based on sermons by Charles Stanley

Key Passage: (*Romans 15:4-5)* "*Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled. May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus."*

Discouragement comes to all of us at times, but we don't have to remain in that condition. Although it often feels like a trap from which there is no escape, every believer has a choice to either stay in a pit of discouragement or to get out. It all depends upon our perspective. If we focus on our difficult circumstances and negative feelings, we can easily be drawn into despair and depression. But when we fix our eyes on our great, encouraging God, He lifts us up and sets us free. In (*Romans 15:4-5),* Paul says that God gives both perseverance and encouragement so that we can have hope. Perseverance is the determination to keep going and not give up, whereas encouragement inspires, motivates and energizes. When we let the Lord encourage us, we'll have the energy, desire, and strength to endure whatever hardship we're facing.

To encourage means to call to one's side; to help, console, or strengthen; or to instill courage in another person. The original Greek word is also translated as comfort in (*2 Corinthians 1:3-4).* No matter what challenges we encounter, God is there to comfort and give us the fortitude to endure. But we'll miss His blessings if we fail to recognize how much He desires to help us. What attributes of God make Him our Great Encourager? A key element in overcoming discouragement is having a personal understanding of who God is and how He operates. Once we identify His attributes and recognize that they are manifested to us through His indwelling Spirit, we'll have a reason to be hopeful even in trying situations. ***God is:***

Merciful - The Lord knows our circumstances and feels compassion for our pain and struggles. Therefore, He bends toward us to give comfort because He is "*the Father of mercies"* (*2 Cor. 1:3*).

Omnipresent - We are never out of God's reach because He is everywhere. Even in times of loneliness and rejection, we are not alone since His Spirit lives within us. (*Romans 8:9-11)* states

"But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to Him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, He will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you."

Omnipotent - Our Lord has all power and governs everything. We never have to wonder whether He is able to handle our situation. He's more than enough for whatever we're facing.

Omniscient - Since God possesses all knowledge, He has the answers to all our problems and is able to give perfect guidance for every decision.

Gracious - The Lord's grace toward us doesn't mean we've done something to deserve it. He knows we cannot be perfect, but He has promised to forgive and cleanse us when we confess our sins (*1 John 1:9*). Even when we continue in disobedience, He graciously disciplines and corrects us so we won't continue on a path that could ruin our lives.

Patient - God is willing to wait even when we procrastinate in obeying Him (*2 Pet. 3:9*). His goal is to bring us along in our spiritual growth, not to cut us off when we fail.

Wise - The Lord's judgments are unsearchable, and His ways are unfathomable (*Rom. 11:33*). He knows what's best for us at each point in our lives and can guide us wisely in every situation.

Faithful - Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful because that is His nature (*2 Tim. 2:13*). What He promises, He will do.

Good - The Lord is not only the giver of good things; He's also the one who determines what is good. When we understand that He allows trials, heartaches, and difficulties because they are beneficial for us, we won't become discouraged by them. In time, we may even look back and thank Him for them.

Unchanging - The God of the Old Testament is the same One we worship today *(Mal. 3:6*). He is still faithful to us just as He was to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and David. He has never changed but has simply given us deeper insight into His nature and ways through His Son. When Jesus came to earth as the God-man and interacted with mankind, He revealed the Father in ways we could more easily understand.

How does God encourage us?

There is no reason to stay in a state of discouragement, because the Lord's attributes clearly reveal His desire to encourage us. However, we must also be aware of the ways in which He reaches out to us.

His Word - Our first response to any challenge, difficulty, or pain should be to seek out God's Word. That's where we'll find His promises to guide and help us. When we believe what He says and trust that He is faithful, we'll be encouraged and strengthened.

Prayer - The Lord doesn't want us to be anxious, but instead to come to Him with every concern (*Phil. 4:6*). One of the simplest and most effective prayers we can offer to the Lord in our times of need

is, "Jesus, help me!" No problem is bigger than our omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God who is committed to encouraging us.

His plans – (*Jeremiah 29:11)* says that the Lord's plan is for our "*welfare*" and is designed to give us "*a future and a hope*." When the circumstances of life become discouraging, we need to focus on this awesome promise and trust that God is working in our behalf.

Friendships **-** When Paul closed his letter to the Colossians, he listed the friends who encouraged him as they worked together for the kingdom of God (*Col. 4:7-14*). We all need genuine relationships like this with people who support and strengthen us spiritually.

Music **-** God often encourages us through favorite hymns or choruses that remind us of His faithfulness and the promise of heaven.

Daily blessings **-** Discouragement keeps us from seeing all the good things God provides each day. But if we'll consider all His daily blessings, our attitudes will be transformed. God has promised to provide all the needs of those who are His children. I like to bring out to the residents of the retirement home and convalescent care I been giving messages at for a number of years, that though they might not like being there, they need to consider that He has given them a roof over their head, a bed, their laundry done, three meals a day, a restroom when needed, friends and others to talk to when they want company, and the staff that are there to meet their needs. When we actively look for Him daily, we'll be able to perceive His love, mercy, and goodness even in difficult or unpleasant times.

Surroundings **-** Sometimes we just need to lift our focus from the troubles of life to the awesome creation around us. The wonder of seasons and the perfect order of the sun, moon, and stars remind us that God has everything under control.

His presence **-** An awareness of the Lord's constant presence with us is so encouraging. No matter where we are or what we're doing, He's with us, working everything out for our benefit.

The Courage to Keep Going **–** Key Passage: (*2 Timothy 4:1-8) – "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when He comes to set up His Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me - the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of His return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to His appearing."*

We're often tempted to give up or walk away when situations become difficult or painful. But believers are called to follow Christ's example of endurance through hardship. Giving up just doesn't fit who we are in Christ. Despite mistreatment, rejection, conflict, discouragement, loneliness, or seemingly insurmountable problems, the Lord wants us to choose to persevere until He redirects us. The apostle Paul is a wonderful example of a man who refused to give up. Even at the end of his life, he was still doing what God wanted him to do. While in a Roman prison, he wrote a letter to a young pastor named Timothy, challenging him to follow his example and keep preaching the Word even when the people would eventually refuse to listen (*2 Tim. 4:1-8*).

The apostle Paul had the courage to keep going despite all the trouble he faced. Paul demonstrated such courage to persevere because he had an awareness that God was with him. In (*2 Corinthians 11:22-28)*, Paul described some of the persecutions, hardships, and pressures he endured—imprisonments, beatings, shipwreck, various dangers, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, and exposure to the elements—yet through them all he knew the Lord was with him. It's easy to believe God is with us when everything's fine, but when times are tough, we must cling to this truth so we won't become discouraged and give up. Too often people quit right before the Lord opens an opportunity, gives a victory, or changes a situation. Paul demonstrated such courage to persevere because he had the experience of the Lord's strength within him. Because Paul depended on the power of almighty God, he could say, *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (*Phil. 4:13*). Today that same divine energy is within every believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This means we each have within us the strength to do the will of God. We may not feel it, but it's there. However, having God's power doesn't exempt us from trouble. The only way we'll have the courage to be strong and carry on is to be in the Word of God. If we'll pray to be strengthened with His power (*Eph. 3:16*), put on the full armor of God (*Eph. 6:11*), and believe that God causes all things to work together for our good (*Rom. 8:28*), we can face whatever is ahead.

Paul had the assurance of being in God's will - Knowing that he was accomplishing what the Lord had called him to do gave Paul the determination to keep going despite hardship and persecution. God had sent him to preach the gospel and reach the Gentiles with the message of salvation in Christ, and he was determined to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith (*2 Tim. 4:7*). If we're going to persist through hard times of doing God's will, we must trust that He will guide us each step of the way (*Ps. 32:8*).

Paul had the overflowing joy of Christ - Even a Roman jail could not steal Paul's joy. Since he was fulfilling God's purposes, he could rejoice. We're all quick to rejoice and praise Jesus when our lives are comfortable and pleasant. But when times get hard, many of us are more likely to complain to the Lord than to rejoice in Him. We forget that He's promised to walk with us and work it all out for our good if we'll respond with praise and trust. When we don't understand the Lord's purposes and trust that He's working for our good, we won't see the value of going through hard times.

Paul also had the hope of the Lord's promised reward - We should never give up walking with Christ through difficult times, because there is more to life than our current circumstances. Paul knew that he

had a "*crown of righteousness*" awaiting him in heaven *(2 Tim. 4:8*). Our heavenly Father has promised to reward each of us, His children, for our faithfulness.

Paul had the vision of the cross before him - Paul's only boast was in the cross of Christ because he knew it was the reason he could survive and keep going (*Gal. 6:14*). When Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself on our behalf, He set the ultimate example of perseverance. Just as He endured the cross for our salvation, so we are to persist through hardship in order to receive His promised reward. He never overlooks our obedience, devotion, or endurance. Love and devotion to Jesus Christ: If we truly love Jesus, our loyalty will not be reserved only for the good times, but we'll remain faithful and obedient even when we experience intense pain and suffering.

Remember – God included you (& us - as Christians) in His salvation plan, having forgiven us of our sins, redeemed us from the penalty of sin, accepting us as we are (by His grace) with unconditional love, justified us, reconciled us to Himself, sanctified us (set us apart), glorified us (past tense) by His finished work on the cross, gave us the power of His Spirit, made us children of God with heaven as our home. Thank Him and praise Him for all He has done for you.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: *Joshua 1:9; Psalms 32:8, 106:1 Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 28:20; John 3:16, 14:18 Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13, 11:33, 15:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:13; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 1:9; John 16:7,13; Acts 13:47; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 11:22-28; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 3:16, 6:10, 14-17; Philippians 1:12, 21, 4:4,13; Hebrews 13:5*

Joshua 1:9 *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*
Psalms 32:8 *The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.*
Psalms 106:1 *Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His mercy and lovingkindness endures forever.*
Proverbs 3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*
Jeremiah 29:11 *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*
Matthew 28:20 *Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*
John 14:18 *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*
Acts 2:21 *And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.*
Romans 10:13 *For Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.*
Romans 11:33 *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*

Romans 15:1-3 *We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't live to please Himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults of those who insult You, O God, have fallen on Me."*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

Philippians 4:6 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

2 Timothy 2:13 *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

John 16:7,13 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper (Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

Acts 13:47 *For the Lord gave us this command when He said, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.'*

2 Corinthians 11:22-28 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served Him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked* hard *and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.*

Romans 8:28 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

Galatians 6:14 *As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.*

Ephesians 3:16, 6:10, 14-17 *I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all,*

taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Philippians 1:12, 21, 4:4, 13 *But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, For to me, living means living for Christ, and to die is gain. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Hebrews 13:5 *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*