

How to grow godly attitudes!

Living the New Life:

Ephesians 4:11-24

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Bethany Church

Wesley J. Gabel

One morning last spring, I heard a report of a large military cargo plane crashing at the air force base where my son John is stationed. Then I discovered a phone message left by him. He had worked on the plane to prepare it for flight, marshaled it to the runway, gave the customary last salute before it took off and was called back to duty when an in-flight emergency was declared. This summer on the internet I saw a simulation of the crash that was put together by military investigators. The pitch of the plane, what aviators call the attitude, was good. The nose of the plane was up. If the plane followed the nose, it would have never crashed. However, there wasn't sufficient action by the crew or power by the engines to make the plane go where it was pointed.

Most human beings will go wherever their noses are pointed; however, sometimes we don't have sufficient strength, wisdom or discipline to follow our noses. If you pitch the nose of the plane too high for its speed, it will stall. Similarly, our attitudes, unrealistically pitched, no matter how positive, will end in a crash when the necessary actions don't follow. Our attitudes can be pitched low in pessimism and run us or others into the ground. Sin is an exaggerated, uninformed, misinformed or just ungodly attitude in action.

It is important to understand that most of us have an attitude that is pitched in a way that will either cause us to stall and crash or run us into some mountain or ground. We all suffer from the attitude of our ancestor Adam. The Bible paints a vivid picture of humanity's fall into

sin and alienation from God. Adam and Eve got their attitude from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. From that moment on, they carried an attitude of judgment as opposed to discernment. They judged themselves naked and shameful. So they hid. They thought in terms of good or evil (influenced by Satan's deceptions), and therefore acted as judges. In contrast, Jesus thought differently. His focus was knowing and obeying God's will. He relied on the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) and the counsel of God's Spirit. Instead of thinking about good and evil, Jesus thought about God's will. He found that God our Father loves and cares for all his children, especially the lost and hurting. (Lost and hurting describe all of us at some point.) He learned that our Father wants his children reconciled to him and restored. Jesus thought in those terms and acted with that discernment. Is that how you think about people here and in the community? Do you think in terms of good or bad, competent or incompetent, like or dislike? Do you think, "What can I do that will help this person in his relationship with God and help him grow in what God wants him to be?" That was Jesus' attitude; and it involved a cross for him. He had to keep at his task, trusting his Father's word, when he was being rejected, when he suffered physical pain and when death was ready to take him.

That is a godly attitude. That is the attitude of Jesus. The Apostle Paul writes:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5, NIV)

Jesus' actions demonstrate that radical trust in God's love and will, radical enough to die, is necessary for new life; because one has to die to their old life to live a new one. We symbolize this transaction in baptism. Listen to the Apostle Paul.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4, NIV)

In growing godly attitudes **Action #1 is to die!** Count you and your way of life, apart from God's Spirit, dead. Every step of your new life is to be informed by God's Spirit. Don't assume that your life and actions are informed. Seek God's counsel. Don't assume your desires and views are righteous. Seek God's counsel. Don't assume your logic is from God. Humble yourself and seek God's vision. To grow godly attitudes, you have to die, trusting that God will shepherd you when you seek him. Is the Lord truly your shepherd? A lot of us might claim that, but I find that I have to humble myself again and again to follow the shepherd.

A part of that seeking is prayer. Another part of that is studying the Bible. If you distrust the Bible, and many do, then there is a "disconnect" between what is happening in you and what happened in Jesus. Jesus affirmed faith in all the Scriptures. That is reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul. Yet the Holy Spirit guided Jesus and the apostles on what Scripture meant and how it applied in their circumstances. Do you remember how Jesus was challenged by Bible scholars for healing on the Sabbath? Do you remember how the Apostle Peter had a vision that was contrary to the Bible's teaching on unclean animals? There are texts of Scripture that the apostles struggled with, and there are texts that I don't understand or know how to apply. I talk to God about them, look at different possibilities and seek understanding. There is something else we can do.

Action #2 is to live in spiritual family. This is what is emphasized in Ephesians 4. God's Spirit works in us and directs us as we relate in this spiritual family we call the church. Now this family is very human. There are weaknesses physically and spiritually in every human being. Yet, God's Spirit pours gifts into this spiritual family. In this family are leadership gifts and partnership gifts. God gives his spiritual family individuals with apostolic vision and ability, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching vision and ability to help us see and do things.

These people are like fathers and mothers of a family. Their responsibility is to equip the family to see and do the family business. The siblings of the family all have partnership gifts that teaming together help us grow and build one another into the very physical expression of Jesus in our generation.

If we regard one another without the work of God's Spirit in us, we miss much of what God is doing and can do. Let me give you an example. This week my mother turned 90, and so I drove up to Minneapolis took her to a board meeting with me. She confided as we traveled that she was feeling blue because she had tried to contact a friend she had helped through a difficult time, but she couldn't reach her. Just that morning her friend's daughter saw her in a grocery store and told her that her friend died several months earlier. I was amazed. I asked her what the chance was of her seeing the daughter in that store. It was slim. I thought, "Doesn't the Bible show us that this meeting was arranged by the Heavenly Father who saw my mother's concern and wanted her informed?" By the time we discussed this, we both realized that the Spirit of God is a lot more at work in the detail of our lives than we can see. It was sad to release a friend in death. It was terrific to know that our Father cares enough to inform us and engineer improbable meetings.

This kind of interaction with our believing family changes our attitudes. It helps us understand what is in this book (the Bible) and see it unfold in our lives. Jesus marveled at the unbelief of his disciples and their blindness to God's righteous hand at work among them. There is a new mind that sees what Jesus sees and believes what Jesus believes. This new mind comes only as we interact as a spiritual family.

Today the Spirit of God is working to grow Christ's attitude in you. It is not transplanted. It is grown as you put actions to the words God has spoken and live as his family.