

Chapter 2

An Attitude of Gratitude: A Gift to Yourself

A wealthy businessman boarded the first-class compartment of an airplane. He was late and almost missed the flight. The rest of the passengers were boarded and waiting for him to take his seat. Some of them were getting restless because of the delay he was causing. Before sitting down, he handed a heavy carry-on suitcase to one of the flight attendants. He pointed to an overhead bin where he obviously expected her to put his suitcase. Knowing that the suitcase was too heavy to lift over her head, the flight attendant said,

"I'm sorry sir, but I won't be able to lift that up for you."

The man instantly became angry. His eyes narrowed and glared at her. Then he spat out, "Do you know who I am?"

Although she didn't recognize his face, she then realized that he was probably famous in some way. Not hesitating, the flight attendant reached for the microphone to the plane's announcement system and said,

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but we have a passenger here that does not know who he is. Can any of you be of help?"

The Man No One Wants to be Around

If this man was that rude with a flight attendant he had never met before, can you imagine what he would act like with his employees or his family? He is the kind of self-absorbed tyrant we all want to avoid. He thought that he owned the world and everyone else needed to serve him. He thought that he was much more important than everyone else on the plane. It didn't seem to cross

his mind that he was inconveniencing dozens of other people because he was running late. We can practically hear him barking out orders in his office. *Get me this! Get me that! Why isn't so and so here? You just can't get good help anymore! You're fired!*

This man needed a new attitude.

But what is attitude? We are sure you at least have an idea about what an attitude is. You have one, your friends all have them, your parents have them, and all of your teachers at school. In fact, everyone across the world has an attitude. Attitude affects all people, all cultures, and all countries. From Africa to Antarctica, everyone's got an attitude.

What is Attitude?





Attitude is the way you look at the world, the way you look at the experiences you have. Attitude is the one single thing that no one can take away from you. You can always be in control of your attitude, although sometimes it may be hard. Whatever happens, you decide how you act and how you think about your experiences.

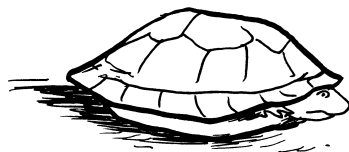
Denis, 59, Golf Instructor



What does your attitude include? It includes your thoughts. It is the way you decide to think about yourself, your life, your friends, your family... and basically everything. Attitude is what goes on in your mind, but others can see it easily by how you act, what you say and what kinds of choices you make.

Bad Attitude:

-  Not me, I'm not good enough.
-  My teacher is a jerk, that's why I'm failing.
-  My day is ruined. My best friend ignored me this morning.
-  If only my mom wouldn't be so strict, I'd be happy.

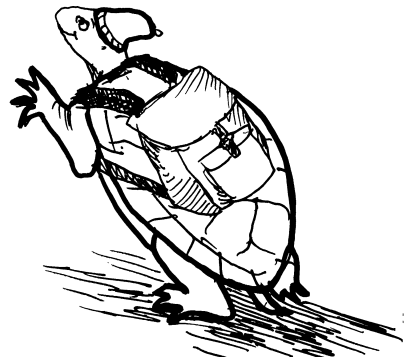


- 👎 If only I could go to another school I'd work harder.
- 👎 I'll never win that competition!
- 👎 I shouldn't even try because I know there are lots of other people that are more talented than I am.
- 👎 If only I had more time, I would have turned my project in.
- 👎 I lost because the referee was crooked!
- 👎 I won't take that class. It would be great, but I'm not smart enough.
- 👎 I'd have more friends if it weren't for my dorky little brother.

When you choose to have a bad attitude, you think that life is full of difficulties. And we're not here to tell you that life is not very difficult sometimes. What we mean here is that a person with a bad attitude believes that everything that happens to him is because of bad luck, mean people, or his lack of ability. This is also called victim mentality. He will never be happy, because no matter what he accomplishes or what he goes through... it is never good enough. According to him, things have usually gone wrong because of someone or something else.

Good Attitude:

- 👍 I can do it if I practice and work really hard.
- 👍 I don't get along with my teacher too well, but I know it is up to me to do well in the class.
- 👍 My friend sometimes says upsetting things, but he's human and makes mistakes. I'm not going to let it ruin my day.
- 👍 I know I can do it!
- 👍 I'm not crazy about my teacher, but if I can learn how to get along with her I can get along with anybody!
- 👍 Talent often can't be seen until you work really hard at



something.



I make time to do the things that are important.



We lost, but we played fair. We will do better next time.



I planned ahead so I would make sure to get my project in on time.



I'll try that class. I think it will be hard, but I know I can do it.



Maybe I can help my little brother out. He doesn't have too many friends.

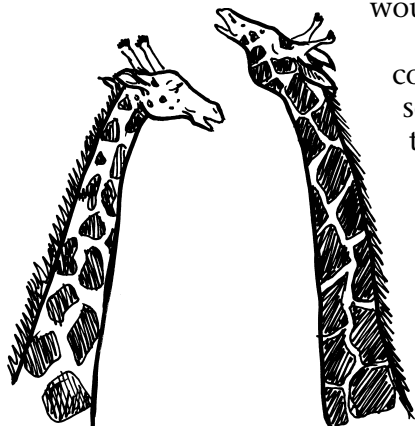
A person with a good attitude sees the possible good things that can come out of challenging or difficult situations. Someone with a good attitude will work hard to succeed, and won't give up. A person with a good attitude understands that even though life is often hard, she is in control of the way she decides to live her life every day. A person with a good attitude doesn't let problems stop her. She doesn't let the bad attitudes of other people ruin her outlook.

A Real Test

Bad attitude can be like a cold. It's easy to catch and almost impossible to get rid of. Sometimes you will be seriously challenged to hold onto your good attitude and to stop someone else from pulling you into their bad attitude.

What would you do if someone began to pick on you at school, call you names and pester you? How would you respond?

You could choose to allow that person to control your behavior, by getting you upset. It sounds funny, but by reacting negatively to that person, you are giving that person the satisfaction they are after in the first place. Maybe the person picking on you is upset because someone else just picked on her. Don't become the third person in the chain of bad attitude. Prove to yourself and to others that you have control—you choose how you respond, and no one else.



Here is how one lunch-time conversation went:

Mark: *Melanie, you are such a snob, no one likes you anyway.*

Melanie: *If I'm such a snob then why do you waste breath talking to me?*

Mark: *Because someone should tell you.*

Melanie: *Thanks for the information, Mark. Why don't you come back to talk when you feel a little better about your own self?*

Melanie was smart enough to figure out (after a lot of bad feelings, unfortunately) that Mark's comments weren't true. He only said those things to make her feel badly. Instead of believing him, she showed him that his bad attitude belonged to him and that he couldn't drag her down with him.

An Attitude of Gratitude

A big part of having a good attitude is being grateful, or having gratitude. But what is gratitude?

Gratitude is thankfulness. You might be grateful for a birthday present, some money you earned, the TV in your room and so on. But an attitude of gratitude is often more than being grateful for the nice things that other people give to you or do for you. Of course, this is also important. But it is only the beginning. Can you think of other, less obvious things that you are grateful for? Here is a story about one young man who discovered just that.



A young handsome boy, named Jim, was being brought down to the swimming pool at the children's rehabilitation center. He was there because he had been in a horrible car accident. He barely escaped with his life. As a result of the accident, his ability to control his body movements from the neck down was severely impaired. He was in a specially built wheelchair. The physical therapist and I helped him into the swimming pool. I was a volunteer and I had been trained to do warm-up exercises with patients before they had a water therapy session.

In the pool I supported his back and began to help him stretch and move. After several minutes of chatting I discovered that he had trained lifeguards in the past. He was one of the key players of his university's soccer team. He had even had a full scholarship to college. He had been a mountain climber as well. And now it took every bit of effort for him to

move his arm or his leg or even his head in the direction he wanted to move. He couldn't walk. He couldn't sit up without help. He was starting over again.

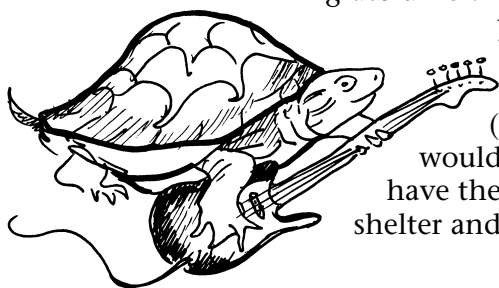
Although I didn't ask him out loud how he felt about what had happened to him, he must have read my mind. He just began to talk, and this is what he told me:

"Two of my best friends died. I am going to lose my soccer scholarship. My body is like a little baby's body, but my mind wants to jump up and go. It's like being trapped in a box you can't get out of and it's going to take a long time before I can do really easy stuff. My parents are so depressed. Almost every time they come to see me they cry. They think that my future is over. It sounds weird but I don't feel that way. When I first woke up after being unconscious from the wreck, and I realized what had happened, I felt one thing. Grateful. When my parents left the hospital that night and I was alone I thought about what had just happened to me. I just kept thinking that it was a miracle that I was alive. Somehow I had survived an incredibly bad wreck. And I thought—there must be a reason I'm still alive. There must be something that I can still do with my life and that is why I am alive. Somehow I had another chance. Somehow I was the lucky one and I'm going to use every day like it's my last."

People who are able to use bad circumstances for something good are the highest example of living with gratitude. There are dozens of stories about people like Jim, who suffered terribly and yet felt grateful. Survivors of wars. People who have experienced brutal injustices. Those who have lost their loved ones to senseless crimes or accidents. And these are just a few examples. How do you think people are able to still see the best in life and in others after such experiences? Perhaps it is looking through glasses tinted with gratitude that makes the difference.

What Are You Grateful For?

Stop for a few minutes. Jot down the top ten things you are grateful for. Look at someone else's list. What do you have in common? What's different? The things you truly love and value are often not tangible (touchable). Of course, your life would be totally different if you did not have the basic requirements: food, water, shelter and warmth. If you were missing even



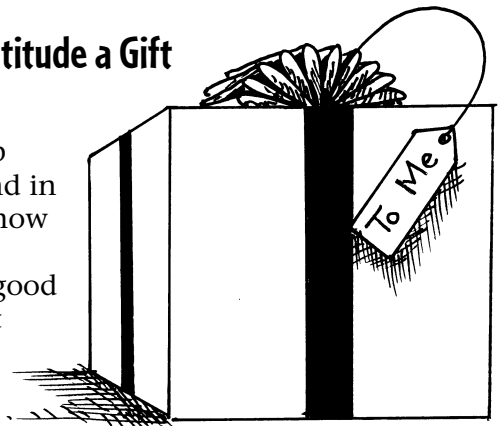
one of these things, you would stop everything else until you found it, because without these basic things you cannot live. Being a grateful person, having an attitude of gratitude, certainly includes being grateful for these things too.

But there are other things to be grateful for. Many of those items may seem so obvious to us that we don't think about them. You might not feel particularly grateful for the heat in your house unless you had to go without it for a few nights when the temperatures were at an all-time low. Let's take a look at some of the possibilities. Remember, this list is just a basic starting point. What else can you think of?

- ☉ People
 - Who washes and folds your clothes for you?
 - Does someone make your breakfast, pack your lunch or give you lunch money?
 - Who buys the clothes you are wearing?
 - Who do you talk to when you feel badly?
 - Who gives you rides when you want to go somewhere?
 - Who takes care of you when you are sick?
- ☉ Intangible items
 - Are you healthy?
 - Are you free?
 - Can you get an education for free?
- ☉ Material possessions
 - Stereos, radios, CDs or other electronics
 - Shoes, a coat, other clothes
 - Furniture (bed, dresser, couch...)
 - Washer/dryer (do you have to do your laundry by hand?)
- ☉ Basic needs (food, shelter, warmth and clean water)

Why is Having an Attitude of Gratitude a Gift to Yourself?

Wouldn't it be great to wake up one day and feel totally grateful and in control of the way you think and how you respond to other people? Of course it sounds wonderful. But a good attitude is not easy to develop. If it were, everyone would have one.



Taking the time and the effort to work on your attitude is probably one of the greatest gifts you can give to yourself. Why, you ask? Because your attitude is your outlook on life. Everything depends on the way you think—your happiness, your friendships and your family relationships. It is impossible to have a terrible attitude and a happy life. The two do not go together. Likewise, it is impossible to have a terrible life if you have a positive attitude.

The only way to develop a good attitude is practice. Practice means that you will make mistakes. You will have slip-ups. That's okay. Having a good attitude is a habit, and habits take time and hard work to create. We will talk about habits in a moment. But before you put this book down, think to yourself: what kind of attitude would I like to have?



Journal

Think of someone in history who had a good attitude. What did this person do or say that showed the way she or he thought? Why do we tend to look up to people who have positive attitudes?



To Do

1. Make a huge list of all of the good things in your life, the things you are grateful for. You may want to make sub-headings for your list such as people, experiences, material goods, intangible items (such as good health), and so on. Try to come up with at least 25 items. Share your list with a partner. Have you forgotten or overlooked anything? How does your list compare with your partner's? Talk to the whole class about your lists. Do you have any items in common?
2. Fold a piece of paper in half vertically. On one side write Good Attitude on the top. On the other side write Bad Attitude on the top. Think about yourself, your friends, and other people around you. Write as many examples of a person having a good attitude and a person having a bad attitude as you can think of. Do not write down any person's name on either of your lists. Talk with your classmates and compare your lists. Do you agree on what makes a good attitude?
3. How do people show their attitude through their actions? Can you think of seven or more ways in which people

show their attitudes without saying a single word? Why is our non-verbal (or body) language so important? In a small group, act out how people show their good or bad attitude through their actions. Can you guess the inner attitude that someone in your group is trying to demonstrate?

Key Ideas

- ☉ Attitude is the way you look at life.
- ☉ Attitude is the one thing that no one can ever take away from you. Only you decide how you are going to think and how you are going to respond.
- ☉ An attitude of gratitude is a great gift that you give yourself and others.



**They are able because
they think they are able.**

Virgil

