

Attitude – The Thing We Can Control  
2 Corinthians 4:1-18  
July 11, 2021

It has been said that there are only two things you can control in life: your effort and your attitude.

In his book, BEEN THERE. DONE THAT. NOW WHAT?, Edwin Young tells a story about a professional golfer named Bobby Cole. Bobby Cole was a very gifted South African golfer. In 1967 he became the youngest player ever to play in the Masters Tournament and made the cut. He was just shy of being 19 years old when he did that. He held that record until 2010 when Matteo Manassero beat his record. Manassero was a few days short of being 17. Bobby Cole played in the Masters Tournament several times since then.

Although Bobby Cole was a great golfer, he had an issue with his attitude as a young man. Now that he is 73 years old, I am sure he is much better with his attitude; at least I hope he is. But as a young man he was almost intolerable. He was full of himself. He was proud, arrogant, and conceited. No one wanted to play with him. He was rude and ill mannered. If something did not work out the way he wanted, he was angry and did not hide it at all. His repellent attitude irritated other players and affected their games. So, no one wanted to play with him.

One year his partner at the Masters was Samuel Snead. Everyone loved Sam Snead. He was gracious and kind. He was patient and well mannered. He was a true gentleman. He was much older than Bobby. In fact, there was about 36-year-difference in their ages. After playing with Bobby for about ten or twelve holes, even Sam Snead got really irritated.

They came to the hole that had a sharp curve to the right; and tall pine trees were standing right where the fairway curved. Sam took out a three iron and hit it right down the middle of the fairway. Then he turned to Bobby and said, “Son, when I was your age and playing this hole, I would take my driver and fade my shot right around the corner, over those pine trees. It would save me at least 100 yards, but that might be a little tough for you.”

Bobby was too proud to take that kind of comment. His anger flashed and he immediately said to Sam, “I can do anything you’ve ever done. Get out of my way.” He took out his driver and then hit a fabulous drive with a slight fade on it. Unfortunately, it hit the top of one of the tall pine trees that Sam had pointed to and

the ball fell down into a deep rough. As both players walked toward their shots, Sam looked back at Bobby Cole and said, “Nice try, son, but I forgot to mention that when I was your age those pine trees were only shoulder-high.”<sup>1</sup> I wonder how Bobby Cole responded to that.

Some intelligent people are defeated by their own bad attitude. Considering all the persecutions that St. Paul had to endure, he could have had some bad attitude about life and ministry. If he had, he could have been defeated as well.

Some of the persecutions St. Paul faced were quite severe. They included: imprisonments; beatings; stoning; getting 39 lashes, at least five times. On top of that he faced hunger, thirst, and all kinds of dangers, even being in a shipwreck at least three times.<sup>2</sup> If anyone could lose patience with life and ministry, it could have been the Apostle Paul.

He could have given in to his difficult situations and circumstances; and could have given up his ministries but he did not. An amazing thing is that he not only he endured all the sufferings but also kept a positive mental attitude. This is what he said about his persecutions:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”<sup>3</sup>

He was persecuted in every possible way; but according to him, not to the point that he could not get up and continue in his ministry. In fact, he considered his persecutions as sharing and participating in the suffering of Christ.

He believed that just like Christ’s sufferings brought salvation and new life to humanity, Paul’s afflictions also opened the door for God’s salvation for people. Knowing and believing that, he found joy and gladness even in the midst of the sufferings. That is the reason why he had such a positive mental attitude in the midst of severe difficulties.

St. Peter shared a similar kind of thought in his letter to the early Christians in Asia Minor. Those Christians were under tremendous persecution during that time. This is what Peter wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Ed young, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994) pp.155-6.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 11:23-27.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. 4:8-10.

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”<sup>4</sup>

Isn't it interesting that people with a deep faith have a different perspective about the sufferings they endure? To them, sufferings are not just something to reject or to avoid. They considered that it is through sufferings and persecutions they experience greater blessings.

Even if we do not have the similar kind of sufferings that early Christians had, our sufferings can also be an avenue through which great blessings flow.

In fact, many people have learned to manage their pain and to use it to enhance their relationship with God and with other people. St. Paul never regarded his pain, suffering and persecutions as God's unfair treatment of him. Instead, he regarded them as a way to identify himself with Christ.

The people, who have a sense of grand purpose in their lives, often see their sufferings as a way through which they accomplish their purpose. Sarah Flower Adams studied hard to be a great actress. In fact, she was very talented. She played the role of Lady Macbeth on the stage. She was very good, and she was on her way to be a great star.

Unfortunately, her poor health did not allow her to continue with stage performance. It was such a great disappointment for her that it was almost unbearable. She was bitter, angry and resentful.

But Sarah didn't spend the rest of her life in resentment. Instead, she began to write religious poems for various publications. At least one of them became an all-time favorite hymn, “Nearer, My God, to Thee.”<sup>5</sup>

“Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!  
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1Peter 4:12-16.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bartleby.com/294/124.html>

<sup>6</sup> UM Hymnal #528 v.1.

Through the years, this hymn has provided comfort and strength to millions of people. When President McKinley was shot by an assassin, and he was dying he whispered this beloved hymn.

When the Titanic was sinking, the ship's band played this very hymn while people sang and prayed as they died.

During the gold rush in Alaska, Evangeline Booth took a band of Salvation Army members and set up a camp in one of the most violent and lawless gold towns. This small group of believers gathered by the side of a river and began singing "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Slowly, various miners joined them in the singing. Soon there were twenty-five thousand men singing along.<sup>7</sup> That was almost everyone in that town.

When Sarah Flower Adams changed her attitude about life, she became an instrument to bless millions of people.

Life is hard and difficult; but with the right attitude, we can all become a blessing. We cannot control what happens to us; but attitude is something that we can definitely control, and controlling our attitude in a positive way can truly be a blessing to us as well as to others.

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<sup>7</sup> Lillian Eichler Watson, Light From Many Lamps (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1951, 1979), p. 45-48.