



VERITAS

Equipping Christians to live by truth—*veritas*—from God.

How to Avoid Being a Walking Contradiction—a Joyless Christian

by Charles Swindoll



Charles Swindoll

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Your choice of attitude is, without question, the single most important choice you make every day. Life is made up of about 10 percent of what happens to us and about 90 percent of how we respond to it. Often what happens to us is completely out of our control, sometimes shockingly surprising, and on occasion completely demoralizing. Nevertheless, how we respond to it is of utmost importance.

This, of course, begins in the home, where we relate most closely to people we love. And it's often even there we fail at the greatest level with our spouse, with our children, with our parents. Even living in neighborhoods, as some of us do,

toward those who are closest to us in proximity.

One of the finest quotes I ever read came from Viktor Frankl, who endured more than one of the horrible Nazi war camps and spent several months at Auschwitz, so near death. When he survived all of that, he wrote,

“The experiences of camp life show that we have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. We can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, independence of mind, even in

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such terrible conditions of psychic and physical distress. We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that anything can be taken from us but one thing. The last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

I remember when I was president of Dallas Seminary, not one time did a

faculty member come to me to talk about some help that he or she would need in working with a student whose grades were lacking. Time and again, however, we would talk about students whose attitudes were rotten, sour, and impacting the class, as well as the faculty member himself or herself.

We have a little radio ministry called *Insight for Living*, where people call in on a toll-free number. We have about 20–30 lines that are open to the public to call in. It so happens that our older daughter works as the one who directs that part of the ministry. She said to me with a sigh several months ago,

“Dad, do you realize the most difficult people that we deal with on the phones are ministers?”

The general public is watching, whether we like it or not, and our attitude is what they remember far more than what we may preach or write or sing or say.

Thankful? Contagiously So!

I want to direct our attention to a few verses in Philippians, which is a letter that is full of great attitudes. When I read the letter to the

Philippians, I come away amazed when I remember that this is not written by a man sitting on the beach, relaxing in an afternoon of sunshine and fun; this is not written by a man who’s enjoying life in the penthouse with plenty.

This is written by a man who’s under arrest! This is a man who responded to life beautifully, though he has endured the dregs of it.

Paul wrote this letter while chained to a Roman soldier, and it is filled with great, contagious attitudes! There isn’t even a word of self-pity.

Philippians 1:3 expresses an attitude of gratitude: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.” Even his prayers have an attitude of joy in verse 4, offering prayer with joy. And there is confidence in verse 6, “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it.” Paul is not even talking about himself! There is not even a parenthesis of “feel sorry for me.”

And then there is thoughtfulness in verse 7, “It is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart—that’s both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partners or partakers of grace with me.”

Verse 12 conveys his optimistic attitude toward his circumstances:

“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.” Because Paul was under arrest, it provided an opportunity for the gospel to permeate Caesar’s household as he led one soldier after another to Christ.

Practice Perpetual Optimism

Having spent a few years in the military, I can tell you that promotions come to those with great attitudes. Demotions often come, or people stay at the same rank, because of poor attitudes.

General Colin Powell released some time ago 18 of what he calls “leadership secrets.” Number 12 says, “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.” He says,

“The ripple effect of a leader’s enthusiasm and optimism is awesome. So is the impact of cynicism and pessimism. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues. I’m not talking about stoically accepting organizational stupidity and performance incompetence with a ‘What? Me worry?’ smile. I’m talking about a gung-ho attitude that says, ‘We can change things here! We can achieve awesome goals! We can

be the best! Spare me the grim litany of the realist. Give me the unrealistic aspirations of the optimist any day.

In verse 18, Paul says, “I will rejoice.” Notice that it is a determination on his part to rejoice. Things around me don’t cause me to rejoice; I make the choice to rejoice. Samuel Johnson said years ago, “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” Perhaps in that concentrated moment, Paul said, “For however long I have to live, I rejoice through it.” Life is a gift—a wonderful, wonderful gift.

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In 2:3, an attitude of humility emerges quickly. “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.” Verse 4 says, “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

How important it is to know that in ministry, which is committed to that concept.

Then, in verses 5–7, Paul uses the classic illustration, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was

also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself.”

Feel “Up” by Stooping Down

I watched with interest a documentary on the gifted contralto Marian Anderson. Not too many years before her death, she was interviewed by a reporter who asked her about the greatest moment of her life. Her singing career had included many big moments from which to choose.

After a long pause, Marian Anderson said quietly that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went home and told her mama that she wouldn’t have to take in washing any more. *That’s humility.*

We find a wonderful reminder of an attitude of humility in verse 14, where Paul says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Aren’t those great words?

I was going through a period of self-pity, and finally it emerged in front of some of our folks at *Insight for Living*. One of my good friends

looked over at me and said, “Hey, cry me a river, Chuck. We’ve all got it tough.” That was a great answer; I needed to hear that.

So it’s tough. Welcome to the ministry! It’s tough—that’s why attitude is what it’s all about. Those who stay positive and enthusiastic in the midst of the toughness are people folks crowd around.

Chapter 3 is full of joy. “My brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Paul warns them of those who could steal their joy and turn their heads. In 4:4, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I repeat, rejoice,” and “Be anxious for nothing” (v. 6).

Stop all of the worrying, stop all of the grumbling and complaining. In prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, turn your concerns over to Him who can handle them. Sometimes those heartbreaking events that level us are just perfectly designed to redefine our lives and give us a whole new direction.

“There’s Great Value in Disaster.”

In 1914, when Thomas Edison was 67, his laboratory and factory burst into flames and burned to the ground. Much of his life’s work was destroyed in the fire, and he lost a tremendous amount of money. The damage was estimated then at what would be about \$100 million today.

Edison’s son, Charles, who was then 24, wrote of finding his father

standing out in the chilly air of the winter night, watching the fire with his mouth open. He saw his son. And his son said of him, “My heart ached for him—67 years old—everything going up in flames. And then I heard my dad shout, ‘Charles! Where’s your mother? Go get her and tell her to bring her friends! They’ll never see a fire like this one again!’ ”

The next morning, Edison walked through the rubble and debris left by the fire and said, “Son, there’s great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burnt up. Thank God we can start all over again.” Three weeks later, he unveiled the first phonograph.

Stop worrying! Instead of worrying, replace it with prayer. Do it! And the peace that passes understanding will march guard duty around your heart and protect it and grow you into a different kind of woman or man than you ever would otherwise be.

The climax hits us in 4:8. For it ends, “Let your mind dwell on these things”—and he names six of them. “Whatever is true [valid, reliable, and honest], whatever is honorable [the term meaning to revere, giving others that which they deserve and what is worthy of respect], whatever is right [upright and just], whatever is pure [undefiled, not smutty, shabby, or soiled], whatever is lovely [amiable, pleasing—the best

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rendering is winsome], whatever is of good repute [it means gracious, admirable], let your mind dwell on these things.”

The choice is yours.

The Joy of Jesus

I have a good friend who wrote a book called *You Gotta Keep Dancing*. In the book, he talks about overcoming life’s situations so that no matter what occurs, you can, through the power of the living God, turn a corner and, learning from that, live a deeper, better, and different kind of life.

It so happened that an 82-year-old man, who had served as a pastor for more than 50 years, in his later years began to battle with skin cancer. He underwent 15 operations on his skin, including his face, leaving him disfigured. Along with the pain that he endured, it made him terribly self-conscious. He found himself becoming more and more of a recluse until he read this little book in which the author encourages the reader not to let any situation take charge of one’s attitude of joy.

Now I quote the response, “After reading a while, the elderly pastor said he put the book down and said, ‘The man is crazy. I cannot choose joy.’” So he gave up on the idea; then he later read in John 15:11 that joy is a gift. Jesus said, “I want to give My joy so that your joy may be complete.” A gift, he thought. A gift. He didn’t know what to do. So he got

on his knees; he didn’t know what to say. So he stumbled with, “Well, then, Lord, give it to me!”

Suddenly, as he describes it, this incredible hunk of joy overwhelmed him, landed on him. He said, “I was overwhelmed—it was like the joy talked about in Peter—a joy unspeakable and full of glory. I didn’t know what to say, so I said, ‘Turn it on, Lord! Turn it on!’” And before he knew it, he was dancing around the house! He said, “After all, the book is called *You Gotta Keep Dancing*.”

He felt so joyful, he actually felt born again—again! And this astonishing change happened at the age of 82. He just had to get out of the house and tell somebody!

So he went down to the local fast food restaurant and got a hamburger, and the woman at the counter saw how happy he was and said, “How are you doing today?”

And he said, “I’m wonderful!”

“Is it your birthday?” she asked.

“No, honey, it’s better than that!”

“Is it your anniversary?”

“Better than that! It’s the joy of Jesus!”

May we all, in our own way, find the joy of Jesus—a gift we receive, a choice we make—in our future ministries and the circumstances we face at this very hour.

Are you in the right crowd?

I’ve had the unexpected privilege of a close working relationship with Chuck Swindoll. He has been a great boss, friend, and mentor over these past 10 years. It has been a time to grasp wisdom and receive encouragement from a true servant who continues to live joyously.

Chuck is right: Life is 90 percent of how you respond to circumstances. Your choice of attitude is key.

So, how do you acquire a biblically positive attitude?

I believe one of the best ways to cultivate a positive attitude is to associate with people who already have such an attitude.

It doesn’t have to be Chuck Swindoll, although it certainly helps to read his books, such as *Five Meaningful Minutes a Day*, which we are offering to send you. If you pray for guidance and look around, there are encouragers all over the place.

Find one. Get to know them. Rub elbows with them. Emulate them. Even ask them about it. It could be one of the most life-transforming steps you can take in a day when so much negative news threatens to bring our countenance low.

Indeed, Scripture itself teaches such a method.

First Corinthians 15:33 warns that “evil company corrupts good habits.” And Proverbs 13:20 assures that “he who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.”

You become like those with whom you associate. If they have bad attitudes, you will be pulled in that direction. But if they are wise, encouraging, positive, patient, and loving, you can reproduce their model of godly character.

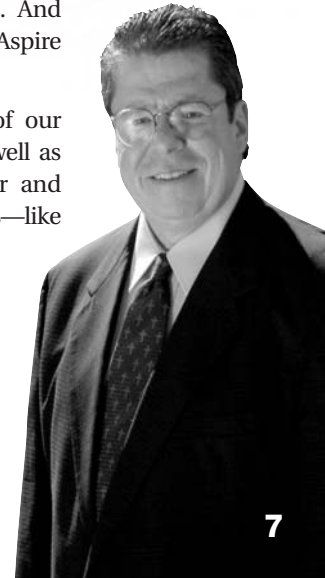
So gravitate toward the right people. Read the right authors. Listen to the right preachers and teachers. Let them rub off on you. And then, let your good qualities rub off on others who need help. Aspire to be a person whose attitude others should emulate.

Dallas Theological Seminary makes it a deliberate part of our discipling and leadership training to focus on attitude as well as doctrine and ministry skills. Thank you for your prayer and financial support that helps produce the kind of leaders—like Chuck—that “rub off” on others.



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
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Take Five!

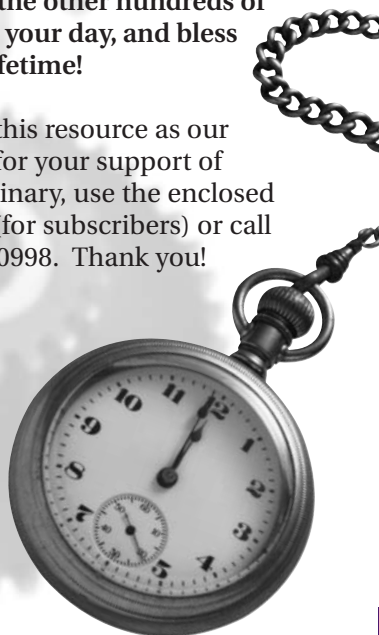
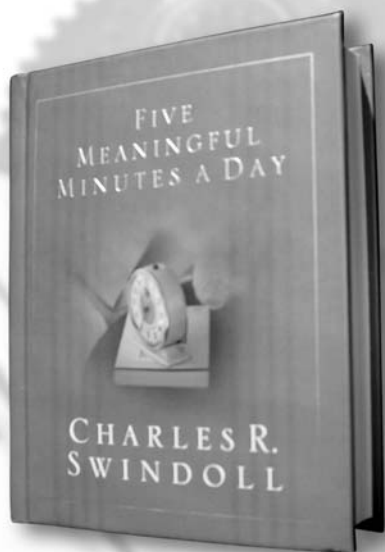
(It could change your life.)

That's right. Five minutes is all it takes to refresh and renew oneself in the midst of a hectic schedule—when those five minutes are spent in the presence of God's Word.

In *Five Meaningful Minutes a Day*, you get 365 concise and inspiring daily thoughts from Chuck Swindoll to draw busy Christians into the Word—replacing the pressing issues of the day with God's peace.

Take five—and watch God transform the other hundreds of minutes in your day, and bless you for a lifetime!

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