

POSITIVE
PERSPECTIVES

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T A B L E O F
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Bubbling Over

If you were a cup, what would you be filled with? This is an illustration I use with my high school students sometimes when we discuss worldliness versus spirituality. I ask them to consider the movies they watch, the music they listen to, and the internet searches they do. I ask them what they are filling themselves with because whatever they are filled with will spill out when they open their mouths. It's like a cup that overflows; a cup filled with juice will not overflow with milk. Likewise, a heart filled with worldliness will not spill out spirituality when jostled. A similar application can be made to being filled with positive words and thoughts versus negative. When your cup is jostled by the bumps in the road, what spills over the brim? Are you filled with thoughts and words that affirm and uplift or words that tear down and destroy? This is a book about filling our cups with positive thoughts that spill out into positive actions and interactions with those around us.

We live in world of negative messages and actions, a world of doubt and suspicion. We live in a culture of rejection and ridicule. On TV, in the movies, on the internet you see messages and images that undercut your self-image, criticize your beliefs, and attack your resistance to temptation. As women, we spend enough time doubting ourselves and our abilities without the added weight of the media's negative messages. We compare our bodies, our parenting successes (and failures), our marriages, and our careers to those

of others around us and find ourselves lacking. In this book, I want to explore ways that we can combat the negative influences of the world around us that will benefit not only ourselves, but our families, friends, church families, and those we come in contact with every day.

Questions to get you started

1. In what aspect of your life do you find it most difficult to be positive: marriage, parenting, body-image, career, etc?
2. What negative attitude do you most often battle in your life: impatience, depression, low self-esteem, resentment, envy, etc?

Positive Attitudes

*But the fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

Galatians 5:22-23

The world around us inspires many negative attitudes within us, and if we are not actively counteracting those attitudes, we are reinforcing them by allowing them to take root and become habitual. Habit-forming negative attitudes distance us from God and make us unpleasant companions for those who have the misfortune to interact with us. Admit it. We all know someone who is a constant complainer, and when we see that person approaching, we are tempted to duck out of the room so that we don't have to be exposed to the barrage of complaints about to be unleashed. We hesitate to ask, "How are you doing?" for fear it will invoke a detailed diatribe on her current health and financial situation. We all go through periods when we are struggling and need to share what we are going through, but some people almost seem to enjoy the misery. People like this create a "joy vacuum," which absorbs all the joy in the room, leaving only gloom in its place. Nobody wants to be that person. No one wakes up in the morning with the conscious intention of snapping at their kids over breakfast or of slandering a co-worker out of jealousy over their promotion or of bringing everybody down by endlessly enumerating her list of woes. So how is it that we find ourselves trapped in these patterns of negativity? More importantly, how do we break free?

Negative attitudes like impatience, discontent, resentment, and envy invade our demeanor and take over our personalities. Where do they come from? Their root is in selfishness and our own human weakness. When we submit ourselves to our own nature instead of the divine nature of God, we exhibit these traits (Ephesians 2:3). These are the fruits of the flesh, the fruits of worldly living and worldly thinking. The fruit produced by our words and actions is evident in the effect we have on others and ourselves. We have a choice between being trees that produce fruit that is either beneficial or toxic to those with whom we interact. As fruit-bearing trees, we will be known, not by the ornateness of our leaves or the gracefulness of our exteriors, but by the fruit we bear (Matthew 7:16-20). Our attitude is the fruit produced either by our submission to self or our submission to the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-25).

Attitude Alterations

Though we each, no doubt, have our own personal attitude impediments to battle, most of them stem from the same source: self. I am impatient with others because they don't do things when or how *I* want them done. I am discontent with my situation because I feel that *my* car, house, kids, marriage, job, or pay doesn't compare well with the people around me. I feel resentment because *I* am not treated with the respect and gratitude *I* deserve. I am envious because everyone else has it better or easier than *I* do. When the center of our world is self, we will always feel like the victim. The world teaches us to look out for ourselves, treat others the way they treat us, and to value others according to what we can get out of them. When Jesus came along, His teachings turned all of those ideas upside down, and He showed us that making God the center of our world necessitates changes in our attitudes and outlook. Altering our attitudes is a matter of choosing a God-centered world-view over a self-centered one. Consider these principles:

1. **Flesh versus faith** ~ *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be thankful” (Colossians 3:12-15).* Both this verse from Colossians and the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 and 23 include love, kindness, longsuffering, and peace. Galatians also adds joy and self-control, while Colossians adds humility, meekness, thankfulness, and mercy. These are the products of a life lived faithfully. The works of the flesh as listed in Galatians 6:19 contain many of those negative attitudes we mentioned earlier: envy, outbursts of wrath (impatience), jealousies (discontent), selfish ambitions (resentment). When we become Christians, we make a choice between attitudes of the flesh and attitudes of faith. Notice this selection from Colossians says “put on” these qualities. These are not necessarily qualities we possess naturally. Rather, we make a conscious decision to display these characteristics and graft them onto our hearts as part of the new creation we have become through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We must choose attitudes that are products of faith rather than fleshly desires.

2. **Whatever** ~ *“...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).* When it comes to teenagers (or any aged person for that matter) the word *whatever* isn’t usually associated with good attitude. It’s usually used to dismiss someone or something as unimportant or unpleasant. But in Philippians 4:8, *whatever* is used as a catch-all for all of the positives on which we should

be concentrating. On what thoughts does your mind dwell: unfulfilled desires, how your life compares to those of your friends, the dozens of annoyances that irritate you at work and at home? If these are the thoughts that consume our minds, it shouldn't be any surprise to find that our attitudes are suffering. "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Garbage in, garbage out as the old saying goes. If our minds and hearts are filling up with negative feelings and negative thoughts, we can expect all of that negativity to make its way out into our conversations and interactions with those around us. Fill your heart and mind with all of the good *whatevers* listed in Philippians, and they will crowd out the harmful thoughts that darken your outlook and sour your attitude.

3. **Love conquers all** ~ *"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil..."* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). According to this passage from 1 Corinthians, love is not envious or proud or selfish. It is patient and kind. Sometimes when we have an excess of bad attitude, it's caused by a deficiency of Christian love. If we strive to love our fellow Christians, our families, our co-workers, and everybody else down to the lady who works the counter at the grocery store as we love ourselves, we will automatically adjust our attitudes toward others. That isn't to say that weak moments and frustrating days won't get the best of us, but when you remember that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself," it helps you understand why it's important to vigilantly alter your attitude so that you can be the best representation possible of what Christ has done in your life (Galatians 5:14).

Positive actions to improve attitude:

1. **Have some humble pie** ~ *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"* (1 Peter

5:6). There are many sources from which we derive pride. Some take pride in their belongings. Some take pride in climbing the ladder of success in their chosen careers. Others take pride in the righteousness of their own actions. Pride is a lie we tell ourselves about our own worthiness. When we think our worth comes from our actions and possessions, we are climbing a slippery slope that often precipitates a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Paul, quoting Jeremiah, says, “he who glories, let him glory in the LORD” (2 Corinthians 10:17). Our worth comes from the grace we’ve been granted by Jesus’ blood; not from what we ourselves have done, but from what He did for us. So, let’s have a little humble pie and put pride in its place.

2. Practice patience ~ *“...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love...”* (Ephesians 4:1-2). It’s true that some people in our lives require more patience and longsuffering than others, but there’s also no denying that God has been patient with us as well. The entire Old Testament is a chronicle of His longsuffering on behalf of His children. Each time we falter, God waits for us to return to the path of righteousness and rejoices when we make our way back. With God’s mercy as our model and an awareness of our own shortcomings, surely we can find motivation to bear with even those people who test our patience most. Sometimes we become impatient with situations or the timing of events in our lives. We know that God has made us promises concerning the answering of our prayers, but perhaps the promises are not fulfilled in the time we expected. The writer of Hebrews encourages his audience to work diligently in the kingdom, having faith that their reward will be forthcoming. “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12). God keeps His promises, but

He chooses the timing. The writer of Hebrews goes on to talk about Abraham and the patience with which he had to wait for the culmination of the promise that God gave him. God gave Abraham the child he had been promised, but not until 25 years had passed. God kept His promise to Abraham, and He will keep His promises to us, but we must wait with patience if we are to reap the rewards of those promises.

- 3. Find your happy place** ~ *“...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:11-12).* Paul wrote those words from prison. If ever a person had cause to be discontent with his situation, it was Paul. Yet, Paul knew that his purpose was to glorify God, and no prison wall could inhibit him from doing so. In Acts 16, we read an account of Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God in prison. How many of us would have been singing the woe-is-me-blues instead of hymns if we had been arrested, denied a fair trial, publicly beaten, and locked up in prison indefinitely? (v.25 and 37) Instead, Paul and Silas used the opportunity to convert the keeper of the prison. (v. 31-33) Paul and Silas understood that the joy that comes from God is not conditional on our circumstances. “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). The joy we find in God comes from our relationship with Him and the salvation He offers. If we are in a saved relationship with God, we can rejoice no matter what the situation. Satan tells us that we will only experience contentment when we reach some future point where our children are more independent or we’ve achieved a particular promotion or a certain level of financial security. In the meantime, we fail to appreciate the blessings of our current situation and bypass the opportunities to serve and teach others because our focus is locked onto some distant point in the future where some hypothetical happiness is waiting.

Don't miss out on today's joy by chasing tomorrow's happiness. Let your current circumstances be your happy place, and praise God for the blessings He has given you no matter the chains that come with them.

- 4. Get the big picture** ~ *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (James 3:16)*. Envy is a selfish dislike of someone else, not necessarily because of any wrong she has done you, but because she possesses something that you want: wealth, popularity, intelligence, etc. Envy resulted in Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery (Acts 7:9). It was because of envy that the Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to be crucified (Matthew 27:17). “Every evil thing” can be found in the presence of envy because of the wickedness some people are willing to perpetrate to bring about the downfall of one whom they envy. You may be thinking that you'd never sell someone into slavery or hand someone over to be killed because of envy, but have you ever spread a juicy rumor about someone because you wanted her to look bad or exploded with anger at someone because you wanted to take her down a peg? Those are often the products of envy as well. Envy is the opposite of loving our neighbors as ourselves, so as long as our hearts are ruled by envy, it is impossible for us to keep one of the most important tenets of Jesus' teachings, thereby putting our relationship with God in jeopardy. To get rid of envy, we have to take a step back and try to take in the bigger picture. Envy is a sin of immediacy: I want what my rival has, and I want it now. When we experience envy, we are focused only on the immediate present in the immediate world; we are living in the flesh and not in the spirit. Titus 3:3-7 describes the progression that leads away from envy: “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared...He saved us, through

the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Envy and its siblings, malice and hatred, are the desires of the flesh, but when the desires of the flesh come in contact with God, they alter. When you recognize the love and kindness God has shown us, the mercy He had to save us, the constant renewing made possible by the Holy Spirit, which He gave us through Jesus, His magnificent grace that allows us to be heirs of eternal life, we know we must, in gratitude, put aside the desires of our old life in the flesh and live new lives. Our new lives in Jesus are so abundant with blessing, what could we possibly want from this world? His riches reach beyond this world so that earthly riches pale in comparison, and envy is overcome by gratitude.

- 5. Leaven with love** ~ *“Now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13)*. Leaven is used many times in the Bible as an analogy for a small substance that produces a dynamic change. A tiny pinch of leaven can permeate a large lump of dough and cause it to expand. Love can do the same in our relationships. As difficult as it may seem, Jesus commanded us to treat others, not as they treat us, but as we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12). That includes those we see as our enemies: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...” (Matthew 6:44). Imagine the difference it would make in the way we viewed those we envy or those with whom we lose our patience if we prayed on their behalf, reluctantly perhaps at first, but more meaningfully as we see the change in our own attitudes toward those people. Love is the underlying principle of Christianity. Love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). Into each of your sour relationships, try sprinkling the leaven of love, and watch what God can do.

Questions and suggestions for thought

1. How should we handle a “joy vacuum”?
2. With what negative attitudes do you personally struggle the most?
3. What blessings do you have in your current situation that you often overlook because you’re busy looking for better?
4. What does Proverbs 14:30 say about envy?
In what ways is that a fitting description of envy?
5. Is there someone for whom you should pray so that you can improve your relationship with her?