

Like water, I tend to seek the path of least resistance through life. We don't intentionally seek the "hard" times, but if they can make us stronger and we must go through them, then let's get the most out of them. One thing within our control determines the positive or negative impact of tough times: *our attitude*.

We don't always choose our circumstances, but we do choose our attitude in response to circumstances. But that choice begins long before the hard times hit.

I'm a disaster response volunteer and just returned from my third flood relief trip in the past year. Some disaster survivors show amazing resilience. They go through horrific experiences but refuse to let the circumstances drag them down. Despite being exhausted, uncertain about the future, overwhelmed by the tasks ahead, and going through the stages of grief over their losses, they've made *the choice* to see beyond the pain of current circumstances. They are determined to move forward, grateful for any help they get, and have hope for a brighter day ahead. But others either don't, won't, or can't see past the current circumstances. What makes the difference?



Many things, like faith, friends, personal history, and health, contribute to our ability (or inability) to manage our attitude. But the hardest time to change our attitude is in the moment when we're struggling with it. An athlete builds his strength and skills off the field so they become reflex in the game. We can do the same by building healthy mindsets so they drive our attitudes when we're struggling. For example:

- **Respond, Don't React** – Have you ever written a scathing email reply, deleted it, and rewritten it in a calmer tone? That first email was a *reaction*, venting your emotions. The second draft was a *response*, hopefully designed to achieve a positive outcome. Recognize when you're reacting – take a breath, let the moment pass – then thoughtfully consider the result you hope to achieve and take actions that will move you toward that goal. Get past the reaction and let the response – not the reaction – drive your attitude.
- **Selflessness** – Negative attitudes are all about "me". "I don't deserve this", "I want something better", "It's not fair", "Why didn't I get...", "I can't...". Taking the spotlight off ourselves and focusing on others' needs automatically puts us in a more positive state. Helping others helps our own attitude.
- **Gratitude** – When we feel entitled, we go negative when our expectations aren't met. When we assume we deserve nothing and are grateful for whatever we get, everything is a source of hope and encouragement. Being thankful sends positive reinforcement to others, but it does even more for our own attitude.
- **Long-term view** – We choose whether to base our attitude on present struggles or on our passion for the future. Focusing on the future motivates us to push through the obstacles in our immediate path.

Hard times aren't easy, but hard doesn't have to be bad.

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