

4 Keys to Success in Relationships

The essential foundation for all good relationships is love. As we learn to walk in it, we can expect to experience the maximum benefit of relating to others.

Everywhere we go, we are in relationship with other people—at home, at work, at church. Being involved in good relationships is one of the things that makes our lives enjoyable. But in order to experience the fullest potential they have to offer, we must build them on a strong foundation.

I have discovered that the strongest foundation for good relations is love. Jesus said, “By this shall all [men] know that you are My disciples, if you love one another [if you keep on showing love among yourselves]” (John 13:35, AMP). As we learn to walk in love in our relationships, we can give up our fight to be right, become a good student of others and discover the best approach in dealing with people in any situation.

The Foundation for Good Relations

I used to feel as if I was fighting the devil from daylight till dark, seven days a week. One morning about 11 years ago I discovered that the primary reason for my struggle was that I wasn’t walking in love.

My husband, Dave, and I had just returned from doing a conference. We went to McDonald’s to have some coffee and read our mail. Both of us were very tired.

When I’m tired, I like to sit in the sun to be revived. But in order to sit in the sun, we needed to sit in one of the booths near the windows, and by the time we arrived, there was only one left. So Dave said, “You go get the booth, and I’ll go get

the coffee.”

As I started walking, I saw out of the corner of my eye a little old man heading for the same booth. I stepped up my pace a bit and beat him to it. Fortunately, he knew the lady who was sitting in the booth right behind us and asked if he could sit with her.

She answered, “Yeah, you can sit here. She beat you to it, huh?”

The worst part of the story is that the man was crippled.

God convicted me right then and there. “Aren’t you cute?” He asked me. “Here you are, a born-again, baptized-in-the-Holy-Ghost preacher, in the middle of teaching an ‘anointed’ series on love, and you’re racing a crippled man for the last seat at McDonald’s!”

This incident helped me realize that I wasn’t walking in love. True love prefers other people and allows them to go first. Love will let somebody else have something, even if it’s the last one available. Love is not self-seeking (1 Cor. 13:5).

In order to truly walk in love, we must get our minds off ourselves and focus on others and their needs. We can have bumper stickers, Jesus pins, teaching tapes and countless Christian books, but if the people we come in contact with can’t see love in our actions, our claim to be “Christian” is of little value.

Colossians 3:12-14 says, “Clothe yourselves therefore, as God’s own chosen ones (His own picked representatives), [who are] purified and holy and well-beloved [by God Himself, by putting on behavior marked by] tenderhearted pity and mercy, kind feeling, a lowly opinion of yourselves, gentle ways, [and] patience. ... And above all these [put on] love.”

The only way that we can put on love is by choice. Just as our

clothes don't jump off the hangers and onto our body, love doesn't just jump out of the Bible and into our character. We must choose to put it on every day; this is our part. But God is the One who gives us the strength to walk it out.

First Thessalonians 5:23-24 tells us it is the God of peace Himself who sanctifies and separates us from profane things—such as the tendency to be selfish and self-centered. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we have the ability to carry out Christ's commandment to love one another.

Don't Fight to Be Right

One way to express our love for others is to be a peacemaker. The Bible says that we are to live in peace with everybody. "Be of the same [agreeable] mind one with another; live in peace, and [then] the God of love [Who is the Source of affection, goodwill, love, and benevolence toward men] and the Author and Promoter of peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

A person who is living in peace is one who has given up the fight to be right. Years ago I found it difficult to be this kind of person. I always had to have the last word, and I always had to be right.

Dave and I would fight over some of the most ridiculous things you can imagine. For example, we would watch a movie on television and fight over who the actors were. It seemed to me that Dave thought half the men on television were Henry Fonda, and it made me so angry I couldn't stand it.

We would go to church every Sunday, rush home and fight over the couch, and then watch movies and argue about who the actors were. One night while we were arguing, I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "Joyce, if Dave lives his whole life and comes to heaven thinking that the person in the movie was Henry Fonda, it really doesn't matter."

Wow! What a revelation.

It's hard to believe I made such a big deal over such insignificant things for so many years! But usually it is the little issues in our relationships that cause the most problems.

The Bible says "the little foxes ... spoil the vineyards [of our love]" (Song 2:15). We need to stop making a big deal out of little things. There are enough big concerns to deal with.

I thank God for the peace Dave and I have in our home and in our relationship now. Every once in a while a conflict will come up. When it does, we confront the issue in love and come to a resolution so we can go on in peace. As you and I commit our relationships to the Lord, He will give us the grace to learn to let go of the little things and experience more of the joy He died to give us.

Seek to Be a Student of Others

Once you and I begin to walk in love and give up the fight to be right, we can be more in tune with the needs of others. Learning to discern others' needs constituted a major breakthrough in my life. Like many people, I had a tendency to give others what I needed instead of what they needed.

A number of years ago, my husband invited me to play a game of golf with him. He was not playing well that day, and after he had hit a couple of bad shots, I put my hand on his back, patted him and said, "It'll be all right."

Dave didn't appreciate my expression of encouragement. He took my hand, moved it and said: "Don't do that. I don't like you doing that. I'll be fine."

I was offended by his response. I got out of the golf cart and stomped down the fairway thinking, *Yeah, you don't need anything, Mr. I've Got It All Together. You can't even take a*

little encouragement because you are too full of pride to admit that you're not doing well.

At this point in our relationship, Dave and I were trying to work through some things. One of the things I was working on was to stop feeling rejected by him. In fact, I was teaching a series on rejection at the time.

So instead of staying mad, I stopped and said to God, "I am not going around this mountain again. I believe You are in charge of my life, and if You allowed this to happen, then there is something You are trying to teach me. What is it?"

God spoke to my spirit and said, "If you were playing bad, you would want Dave to pat you on the back and encourage you. If he didn't, you would think he was cold and unloving. The problem is that you're trying to give Dave what you need, and he doesn't need that."

This comment opened my eyes. God showed me that the reason for many of the problems in our relationships is that we don't take the time to stop and study the other person. If we will follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will show us what others need. Once He does, we need to freely give it to them.

The fact that we don't need a particular thing doesn't give us the license to withhold it from somebody else. Proverbs 3:27 says, "Withhold not good from those to whom it is due [its rightful owners], when it is in the power of your hand to do it." If we will slow down and seek to understand others instead of seeking to be understood, we will be able to give them what they need.

Adjusting and Adapting Our Approach

Sometimes in relating to others it is necessary to make adjustments in our approach to handling issues that involve them. We determine what these adjustments are by getting to

know them. First Thessalonians 5:12 says, "Get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]."

Paul is referring here primarily to people who are over us in leadership, but I believe this instruction can be applied to all our relationships. The more time we take to get to know those we are in relationship with, the better we will be able to understand them and make the required adjustments.

When I first began walking with the Lord, I was a very stubborn woman. I felt as if all the problems I was experiencing were the result of other people, and if they would just adapt to me, the majority of my problems would disappear.

Romans 12:16 quickly set me straight. It says, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits." In other words, you and I need to be ready and willing to adjust to others—not wait for them to adapt to us.

I had to apply this verse to my relationship with my general manager many years ago. She has always been very respectful and kind, but we have two very different personalities.

She has a melancholy type of personality, and I have a choleric one. This means that she is very detailed and desires plenty of information and time in order to make a quality decision. I, on the other hand, am less concerned with the details and more interested in making a quick decision.

Before I got to know her as well as I do now, I would talk to her about different issues and expect her to give me a quick evaluation of the situation. As a result, she would become very upset and sometimes even cry.

Her response frustrated me. Finally, one day I asked her, "Why are you crying? I am just asking a question. What is the problem?" She said: "I feel pressured—I feel as if you are forcing me to give you an answer that I don't have yet. I need time to think."

Now, I could have taken the attitude, *I'm the boss, and I don't have to put up with this*. But I certainly wouldn't have been exhibiting the love of Christ: "Love endures long and is patient and kind. ... It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

To walk in the love of Christ, I had to adapt and adjust my way of handling these types of situations with Roxane. I had to give her more time to make a decision.

The fact that I can make a decision faster than she can doesn't mean I'm better—it just means we're different. If I had chosen not to change, I would have missed out on many years of her faithful assistance, which has been a tremendous blessing to both our ministry and me.

People Change From the Inside Out

The bottom line is that all of us are uniquely different, and God created us that way on purpose. I have come to the realization that it is a waste of our time and energy to try to make people what we think they ought to be. We need to learn to make allowances for them—to give them time and space to make mistakes and grow at their own pace.

The Bible says you change, "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight" (Phil. 2:13). If you and I don't have the power to change the flaws in our own lives, then we certainly don't

have the power to change them in others. Only God can change people, and the changes He brings—which are permanent—come from the inside out.

I encourage you to give up finding fault with others and to instead look for the best in them. Make a decision today that you are going to submit to God and begin walking in love. When you do, your relationships will improve, and you will enjoy all the people God has placed in your life!

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