

Give Yourself the Gift of Better Relationships

Holidays are a time when many of us find ourselves thrust into a sea of social activity. We entertain family members we may not see on a regular basis. We attend parties. We invite people into our homes. Some people thrive on this type of busyness. For others, it is painful and stressful, especially for those who may have had a past problem with a relative, friend, or coworker. How sad it is that such a joyous time of year has to be marred by the fact that people lack the ability to get along with others. Difficult people do exist. But with some skill, you and I can get along with just about anyone. This doesn't mean we have to embrace everyone into our personal lives. What it does mean is that we can have civil relationships with even the most hard-to-like people. How can you develop this skill? Four relationship-building ideas:

1. Let Go of the Past- through forgiveness. Look at each day as a new beginning in your life. If someone slighted you yesterday, keep that slight there. Don't bring it into the present. At the start of each new day, thank God for the day that awaits you.

Also, tell yourself that you are going to make every effort to enjoy smooth relationships throughout the coming day. Remind yourself of Jesus' wise words: "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".

2. Check Your Own Attitudes. Are you causing the friction you experience in relationships? Are you friendly or stand-off-ish? Do you know how to make light of situations or are you deadly serious all of the time? Do you look down your nose at people who you believe hold menial jobs or are not as intelligent as you? Honestly examine the way you conduct yourself.

3. Lose Yourself. Forget yourself, forget your problems. Instead, think about and pray for others who are experiencing trouble. Also, pray that all self-consciousness will leave you so that you can be natural with other people. Remind yourself that every person is a child of God and is therefore of great value.

Besides praying for others, another way to improve the relationships in your life is to build up the people around you. This will also help you lose your own self-consciousness because you'll be dwelling upon others. When you speak with people, look them in the eye and listen carefully so they feel what they are saying is important. Encourage them in their endeavors. Look for reasons to sincerely compliment them or their actions. You should also practice believing in people and their inherent good. Sometimes this is difficult in a world so full of immoral, unethical behavior, but remember *everyone* is a child of God. While it is true that occasionally someone will fail you, it is more likely that your belief in a person will make him want to succeed.

All of this especially applies to people with whom you have strained relationships. If you struggle to get comfortable with these people, you'll need to work extra hard. Concentrate on each person with whom you have difficulty. Study them and think about their personal situations. Hold these people's situations in prayer. Next, list their positive attributes. Record them, but do so honestly. Then seek a time when you might make mention of those qualities you admire. Make every person like himself a little bit better and I promise that he will like you very much.

4. Love Others. "Love your enemies."

This takes tremendous spiritual strength. It is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on Jesus. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

God does indeed provide us with the ability to love our enemies. We just need to open ourselves to that love.