

How Can I Have Better Relationships?

Series: It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers

Galatians 5:22-23

May 14, 2017

SUMMER WORSHIP

We are in the midst of our series “It’s Somewhere: Looking for Answers.” We are looking in the boxes of life and Scripture to find answers to some of life’s most difficult issues. We’ve talked about “Why Do Bad Things Happen”, “What about Our Future?”, and having Doubts. So it is appropriate today to deal with the question, “How Can I Have Better Relationships?”

BOXES AS KEEPSAKES

These boxes are usually reminders of good times, past achievements, sweet memories of life, family, and friends.

But sometimes, these boxes show us not just what the past was, but reveals to us what the present is. Pictures of people who were close that are now far apart.

Every single one of us probably has a relationship that is not really where we want it to be. Maybe it has cooled over the years. Maybe there was a falling out, and it hasn’t gotten better. Maybe some bad habits have been allowed to continue, and as a result, resentment has taken hold.

BEN FRANKLIN AND HIS SELF-IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Now, we could all probably write down characteristics within ourselves that we might want to work on, and you are free to do that. But might I suggest that there is already a list in the Bible, a very famous list that we call the Fruit of the Spirit.

The Fruit of the Spirit is a biblical term that sums up the 9 visible attributes of a true Christian life. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the fruit that all Christians should be producing in their new lives with Christ. They are the physical manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit and a Christian’s transformed life.

I invite you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin. And to help us with this, I want to broaden our thinking about these familiar fruits with the paraphrase in the Message Bible by Eugene Peterson. So follow along in the chart as I read Galatians 5:22-23 from the Message Bible:

But what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.¹

May I suggest that we use these 9 fruits to help us consider what we might do to have a better relationship with your mom, spouse, a sibling, a co-worker, or a friend.

And as we go through these, may I also suggest that you start thinking of someone whom your relationship is not what it should be – think of one, maybe two people with whom you want a better relationship – and right down some ideas in each area that you might try to have a better relationship.

¹ Galatians 5:22-23 (MSG)

First, Love: Affection for others.

I like how the Message Bible translates 1 John 4:16:

*God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us.*²

Love – true love – is a sure sign of the presence of God, because God is love. And through Jesus Christ, our greatest goal is to do all things in love.

In the famous Love Chapter, Paul tells us:

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*³

Love in Greek here is *agape*, self-less love. It is the kind of love Christ had to come and die for us.

How can you improve a relationship with selfless love: affection for others? Let me give you a moment to write something down.

Second is Joy: Exuberance about life.

The Greek is *chara*, and it is most often describes that joy which has a basis in faith.⁴

Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us:

“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”⁵

This is not the joy that comes from earthly things, still less from triumphing over someone else in competition. It is a joy whose foundation is God.⁶ It is an ability to focus on what is good, thankfulness that leads to joyfulness.

MYRA AND I'S RELATIONSHIP: FUN TOGETHER

How can you improve a relationship with joy, an exuberance about life? Let me give you a moment to write something down.

Third is Peace: Serenity.

The word Paul uses for peace here is *eirene*, and in contemporary colloquial Greek, *eirene* had two interesting usages. It was used of the serenity which a country enjoyed under the just and beneficent government of a good emperor; and it was used of the good order of a town or village. Villages had an official who was called the superintendent of the village's *eirene*, the keeper of the public peace. Usually in the New Testament, *eirene* stands for the Hebrew *shalom* and means not just freedom from trouble, but everything that makes for a person's highest good. Here IN Galatians, it means that tranquility of heart which derives from the all-pervading consciousness that our times are in the hands of God.⁷

Some relationships have very little peace. Nothing but harping or griping or nagging or criticizing. That does little provide peace or serenity.

How can you improve a relationship with peace, serenity? Let me give you a moment to write something down.

² 1 John 4:16b (MSG)

³ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV)

⁴ See Psalm 30:11; Romans 14:17; 15:13; Philippians 1:4, 25

⁵ Nehemiah 8:10d (NIV)

⁶ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Galatians 5:22

⁷ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Galatians 5:22

Fourth is Patience: a willingness to stick with things.

Moms need a lot of patience, don't they?

GREGGIE AND THE BABY OIL.

Generally speaking, the word Paul uses is not used of patience in regard to things or events but in regard to people. The most illuminating thing about the word is that it is commonly used in the New Testament of the attitude of God towards us.

Romans 9:22 says,

*In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls...*⁸

If God had been a person, He would have wiped out this world long ago; but He has that patience which bears with all our sinning and will not cast us off. In our relationships, we must reproduce this loving, forbearing, forgiving, patient attitude of God towards others.

How can you improve a relationship with Patience: a willingness to stick with things? Let me give you a moment to write something down.

Fifth is Kindness: a sense of compassion in the heart.

The word here means to be mild and pleasant, as opposed to harsh, hard, sharp, or bitter. How many times was our mother kind to us: telling us that painting was beautiful when it was crap, holding us when we were sad or hurt. So many times.

It's acts of random kindness that we hear about in life today. Someone paying for the coffee or the meal of a stranger behind us. Mowing or raking or snow blowing for a neighbor, simply out of kindness. Remember, love is patience and it is kind.

How can you improve a relationship with Kindness: a sense of compassion in the heart? Let me give you a moment to write something down.

Sixth is Goodness: a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people.

Now, what do we mean by that? I believe that God created everything: you, me, nature, the universe, everything. It didn't just happen. You are not a product of evolution. You are special, and so is everything else, even spiders and snakes. That's one of the reasons I can't stand to see dogs abused and mistreated. God created them, and because God created them, we should treat them with goodness.

So if you are special because you have been created by God, then I should treat you with goodness, doing something that is beneficial to you. And the same goes for the relationships you have.

Paul says that the light of God "within you produces only what is good and right and true."⁹

How can you improve a relationship with Goodness: a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people? Let me give you a moment to write something down?

Seventh is Faithfulness: involved in loyal commitments.

Paul uses the Greek word *pistis* which is the characteristic of the person who is reliable.

⁸ Romans 9:22 (NLT)

⁹ Ephesians 5:9 (NLT)

Of course we know that God is faithful, and the fruit or the result of the presence of the Holy Spirit is exactly that: faithfulness. We will be faithful in our relationships, in our dealings with others.

Isn't it one of the hardest blows to a relationship when someone isn't faithful? It could be a friend betraying you to others, or when someone promises you something and fails to fulfill it. Of course, infidelity is the cruelest of unfaithfulness.

So, have you in some way failed to be faithful in one of your relationships? Trust and reconciliation take time, and we aren't getting any younger.

So how can you improve a relationship with Faithfulness: involved in loyal commitments? Let me give you a moment to write something down?

Eighth is Gentleness: not needing to force our way in life.

The Greek word here means meekness, humility, patience, being considerate and unassuming, as opposed to rough, hard, angry, violent, or bad tempered.

Paul says in Galatians 6:1

*My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.*¹⁰

Gentleness brings someone back into the spiritual fold, and gentleness can restore a relationship.

So how can you improve a relationship with Gentleness: not needing to force our way in life? Let me give you a moment to write something down?

And finally, Self-control: able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

The Greek word here is *engrateia* which means power or lordship over oneself, that is, being inwardly strong. In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul uses the analogy of an athlete and their discipline, their self-control, as a guide for us as well living out our faith.

So many relationships have been destroyed because one person could not control their anger, their tongue, their urges. But self-control makes a person master of themselves so that they are fit to be the servant of others. Self-control says, "I will do for you because I have control over the inner 2 year old in me."

So how can you improve a relationship with Self-control: able to marshal and direct our energies wisely? Let me give you a moment to write something down?

So hopefully, you written down 9 ways to have a better relationship with someone in your life, and Myra has written down 9 things I need to do for Mother's Day to have a better relationship with her.

Let me tell you in closing that all of these things – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. They come from God, and it is to God that we must come and seek them to help us have a better relationship. It will be through prayer, Bible Study, and submission to His guidance that you can create new and wonderful memories that you place in another keepsake box.

¹⁰ Galatians 6:1 (NRSV)