



Leviticus 19:18b

YOU SHALL LOVE
YOUR NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF:
I AM THE LORD

You shall love the Lord
your God with all your
heart, with all your soul
and with all your
strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5

Philippians 1:9

And this I pray, that
your love may
abound still more
and more in
knowledge and all
discernment.

GROWING IN HIM COUNSELING

**And this
commandment we
have from Him:
that he who loves
God must love his
brother also.**

-1 John 4:21

Are Relationships Difficult?

God created us to be in communion with each other. He created Eve to give Adam a partner because He saw that all the animals He created did not give Adam the fellowship he needed. So if we were designed to be in relationship with each other, why does it feel so hard? The easy answer is sin. We all sin and cause problems within relationships. We are prideful, selfish and often arrogant. When our focus is on God, we can learn to love others' the way He loves us.

There are many types of relationships: spousal, parent-child, friends, colleagues/co-workers, extended families, neighbors, acquaintances, etc. These are often made more challenging due to mistakes, hurt feelings, abuse, and trauma, to name a few. We then try to protect ourselves by building up walls, getting angry, distancing ourselves or shutting down. Although these responses are normal, and could even be justifiable, they do not encourage healthy, happy connections.

Within all these relationships, the Bible gives us guidance on how to proceed. Jesus is very clear that we are to forgive others as He has forgiven us. This does not mean remaining in an abusive/toxic relationship. It does mean allowing God to maintain justice and not seeking revenge. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says "love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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."

How Do We Respond Differently in Relationships?

It is natural to get upset when feelings are hurt, mean things are said and we are disrespected or insulted. Unfortunately, holding onto hurt feelings does not help you or the relationship. If you are too upset to calmly respond to the situation, take a deep breath and/or leave the conversation until you can calmly discuss your concerns. Use "I" statements to explain how you feel about the situation and try to avoid blaming the other person. Take responsibility for your part in the interaction and look to ways to compromise a resolution that works for both parties. "I" statements such as "I think," "I feel," "I am," rather than "You are..." It is also helpful to consider alternative explanations for the other person's behavior rather than assuming you *know* their intentions. Giving them the benefit of the doubt as well as grace is a great tool to diffuse a situation.

It is good to reflect on your reaction to the situation. The first thing to do is recognize you are hurt. Next try to determine (without blame) the true cause for your hurt feelings. Was this person intentionally trying to hurt you, are you overworked, tired and more sensitive than normal, did it hit a nerve and remind you of a time in the past when you were hurt deeply? If the conflict is due to a miscommunication or direct insult from another person, it is important to have a conversation with this person. Pretending as though you were not affected and "letting it go" rarely works and is not healthy. If the issue is more personal and a projection of your own issue rather than the other persons words/behavior, then it is a good idea to process through this yourself, with a trusted friend or a professional.

Responding in Love

Using 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 as a guide,
Let's see how we can respond in LOVE.

1. **Love is patient**, In a world of fast-paced, immediate gratification, we all struggle with patience. Being patient with everyone you meet can change your heart towards loving others.
2. **Love is kind**. It is easy to be kind to those who are kind to us, however, being kind in response to insults, anger, or mean people can change the interaction and quickly diffuse a challenging situation.
3. **It does not envy**, Americans especially tend to want more, newer, better...everything. Being content with what God has provided for you and grateful for all that you have leads to joy and happiness that can't be found in things.
4. **It does not boast**, Boasting comes from a place of pride and believing you have obtained your worth through your own efforts rather than gifts from God. It can create disdain and anger in others, thus ruining relationships.
5. **It is not proud**. Pride is different than confidence. Confidence is good. Pride is not. Knowing that all you have and all you are comes from the grace of God will provide confidence and remove pride.
6. **It does not dishonor others**, Putting people down or looking for ways/reasons to show their faults is a common practice that hurts them as well as yourself.
7. **It is not self-seeking**, Focusing on the achievement of others and building them up is a great way to establish and maintain strong relationships.
8. **It is not easily angered**. Getting angry is a normal, God-given emotion, however, it is necessary to manage your anger and respond calmly in most situations.
9. **It keeps no record of wrongs**. This one can be hard in close relationships (close friends, spouses, parent/child). God has forgiven us and we are asked to forgive others' which requires us to not repeatedly bring up past mistakes. (This does not apply to abusive situations in which professional help may be required)
10. **Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth**. Satan is evil and enjoys twisting the truth to his desires. Focusing on the truth as stated in the Bible and standing firm against evil is critical.
11. **It always protects**, Protect your loved ones physically, emotionally, sexually and spiritually by putting their needs before your own and standing up for or defending them when necessary.
12. **Always trusts**, It is easy to trust when we are doing well, but it is hard to trust when we have been hurt. We can start by trusting that God is in control and trust in His love and trust that our loved ones have good intentions as well.
13. **Always hopes**, God is our true source of hope, knowing He will always provide. Staying hopeful helps to remove doubt and anxiety. If you are struggling with hope, ask God to remind you of His love and then practice being hopeful in Him.
14. **Always perseveres**. When things are tough, we push through. We strive to take the "narrow road" and do what is best, not what is easiest. Relationships can be hard, but they can be very rewarding as well.

Challenge yourself to do the hard thing and look for ways to improve all your relationships. Start with one small act of kindness and offer grace and mercy wherever you can. Watch as your relationships begin to change!

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