

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH part 5: PLEASING GOD

### BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

God designed all of us for two types of relationships: First, we all need a VERTICAL relationship with God. God created man with a vacuum, an emptiness in his life that cannot be filled by anything or anyone but God. We may try to fill this void with success, power, drugs, alcohol, sexual gratification but nothing ultimately satisfies apart from a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ.

Second, we all need HORIZONTAL relationships with people. God created two basic institutions to fill this need: the family and the church, the body of Christ. Some people think they don't need other people. In the 4th century AD, the Roman Empire was crumbling and persecution against Christians was increasing. Many Christians fled Rome to escape the pagan society and persecution. There was one Christian in Rome who came up with an idea for escaping without leaving Rome. At the ruins of a large building, he found a freestanding 60-foot pillar. He constructed a crude ladder and climbed to the top of the pillar. Then he kicked away the ladder and watched it break into pieces. There was no turning back now. For the next 30 years, he lived on top of his pillar. He survived by lowering rope and bucket. He would lower the rope, and people passing by would drop food in the bucket, or fill it with water, and he would pull up the rope.

That's not the way God wants us to live our lives. He made us to be social beings with a relationship with Him and with others. The problem is that building relationships is hard work. It pleases God when we do relationships His way.

### VALUE RELATIONSHIPS OVER CIRCUMSTANCES

We've been taught in our world that circumstances are the key to happiness. That's why people will spend mega hours at work and at the same time neglect their families for a life time. Children virtually grow up without parents because their parents are busy making money so that they can buy more things.

*Proverbs 15:17 "A bowl of soup with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate."*

*Proverbs 17:1 "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife."*

A Big Mac at McDonalds with someone you love is better than a steak at Outback with someone you don't love.

Better to be stuck in a traffic jam on I/10 with someone you love than to go to the beach with someone you don't love.

Better to be in Wal Mart with someone you love than be in Neimun "Mark up" with someone you don't love.

What we all want is steak with someone we love, but sometimes you can't have both. Some of you are probably facing choices like that now. The book of Proverbs' advice is choose relationships every time. Why? Because that's what is going to be important in the end anyway. If that is true, why not choose in the beginning what's going to be important in the end? Relationships. That's what makes life work.

## **DON'T EXPECT ANYONE TO MAKE YOU FOREVER HAPPY**

It's not uncommon for people to expect some other person to be the source of their happiness. That other person could be a friend or a parent, a sibling or a child. The "make me happy" expectation is especially prevalent in what people expect from their marriage partner. They've been told all their lives that the ideal script goes like this: "meet Mr. or Ms. Right, fall in love and then live happily ever after."

Marriage cannot make people happy any more than money can make people happy. It just doesn't have that kind of power. It can add to your happiness, but it can't create it. If you are a fundamentally unhappy person, if you have a bad attitude or a bitter spirit, marriage won't change that. In fact, it will probably make things worse, because marriage exposes those kinds of weaknesses and that exposure is very painful and *unhappy*.

So, if you want to be happy when you are married, learn to be happy before you are married. Many people are so consumed with finding a marriage partner that they don't do the things that will make them happy now. Instead of being unhappy because you don't have a mate, concentrate on serving God and letting Him fill the void in your heart. Concentrate on knowing and fulfilling the purpose has for your life. There is no circumstance too big for Him. There is no trial or blessing so huge that it overshadows His ability to help you walk through it.

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:12-13).*

The truth is there is no one on earth who can give you the kind of personal fulfillment you are looking for. Only God can do that.

## **ACCEPT PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT THAN YOU**

One of the big problems we have in getting along with people is the fact that many of them are so different than we are. You may be very proactive in the way you deal with problems. If there is a potential problem, you want to get on it immediately. Your co-worker, however, doesn't want to deal with an issue until it has to be dealt with.

You may be someone who works well with details. You want to have all the parts of the issue before you before you make a decision. Your co-worker, spouse, friend etc. doesn't want to be bothered by a lot of intricate details. He is content on dealing with the broad outline of the big picture.

You may have a thing about keeping things very structured, very clean and orderly, but you may live with someone who is content as long as things don't fall on him when he walks through the house. These are the kinds of things that drive people crazy and make them very upset with one another. They destroy relationships.

In Romans 14, Paul spends a lot of time helping people to accept others who do not see things the way they do. Then in Romans 15:7, he sums it up by saying, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." What do you do with people who see things so differently than you do? God says we are to accept them just as He has accepted us.

### **1. Realize Different Doesn't Necessarily Mean Wrong**

Psychologists tell us that a lot of things are hard-wired into us at birth. In fact, if we could all take a trip to the nursery, we could look at those babies and quickly separate the introverts from the extroverts, the thinkers from the feelers, the structured from the unstructured, and so on. Remember that you are not the infallible standard for all that is right, and people are not necessarily wrong because they are not like you.

### **2. Focus on their positive qualities.**

Everyone has both positive and negative qualities, and you get to choose which of those two you will focus your attention on. The truth is that many of the things we may consider to be negative in someone's life may be actually be positive and needed.

*Suppose the whole body were an eye--then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? But God made our bodies with many parts, and he has put each part just where he wants it. What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part! ... The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." 1 Corinthians 12:17-21 [NLT]*

In other words, in the same way that each part of the human body, on its own, is incomplete ... each person on their own is incomplete. We need all kinds of people in the church, in the home and in the world.

### **3. Be Open to Change**

I'm not talking about changing the other person. I'm talking about making some personal changes. Everybody thinks of changing Humanity and Nobody thinks of changing Himself. (Tolstoy) Instead of being consumed with changing the other person, we must be willing for God to change us.

*Psalm 139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

We would probably all be very surprised at how we would see some of the things people do in a more positive light if we would make some needed changes in our own lives.

## **LEARN TO COMMUNICATE**

Most of us have trouble communicating, especially when it comes to conflict and tension in our family relationships, and men have a harder time with communication than women do. Women typically have much more to say.

For example, here's 2 women talking about a visit to the hair salon.

You got a haircut! That's so cute

Do you think so? I wasn't sure when she gave me the mirror. I mean, don't you think it's too fluffy looking?

Oh no! It's perfect! I'd love to get my hair cut like that, but I think my face is too wide. I'm pretty stuck with this style I think.

Are you serious? I think your face is adorable. And you could easily get one of those layer cuts - that would look so cute.

I was actually going to do that except that I was afraid it would accent my long neck.

Oh- I can't believe you said that. I would love to have your neck! Anything to take attention away from this two-by-four I have for a shoulder line.

Are you kidding? I know girls that would love to have your shoulders.

Everything drapes so well on you. I mean, look at my arms - see how short they are? If I had your shoulders I could get clothes to fit me so much easier.

Here is 2 men talking about the same subject.

Did you get a haircut?

Yep.

People communicate differently, but there are some general principles that will help us communicate with anyone.

## **1. SPEAK GRACIOUSLY**

The power of speech is a gift from God, and it must be used the right way. In the book of James, the tongue is compared to a fire, a poisonous animal or, it can be a fruitful tree and a fountain of refreshing (James 3). It has the power to wound and it has the power to heal. We chose how and to what end we will use it every time we open our mouths.

*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6).*

Grace is unmerited, undeserved favor. The word is used throughout the bible to describe how God deals with us. He gives us good things that we don't deserve. God says, "That's how I want you to speak with others. When you're speaking with someone, bless them by your words even though they don't deserve to be blessed.

We see it in Dr. Booker T. Washington, the great African-American Educator. One day as Professor Washington was walking to work at the famous Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he happened to pass the mansion of a very wealthy woman. The woman didn't recognize Booker T. Washington, and she called out to him thinking he was one of her workers. "Hey you! Come here. I need some wood chopped!"

Without a word, Professor Washington peeled off his jacket picked up the ax and went to work. He, not only cut a large pile of wood, but also carried the firewood into the house and arranged it neatly by the fireplace.

He had scarcely left when a house servant said to the woman, "I guess you didn't recognize him, ma'am, but that was Professor Washington!" Embarrassed and red-faced, the woman hurried over to Tuskegee Institute to apologize. Booker T. Washington replied: "There's no need to apologize, madam. I'm delighted to do favors for my friends!" That's gracious speech! By the way, that woman (from that moment) became one of Tuskegee Institute's warmest and most generous supporters.

## **2. SPEAK OPENLY BUT LOVINGLY**

When the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christ followers in the city of Ephesus, he said, "speaking the truth in love [underline], we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

Nearly every breakdown in communication results from a deviation in this pattern of speaking the truth in love. Let me give you three ways it happens.

Communication breakdown #1 is not speaking at all.

There's no truth and there's no love, only silence. And that can be deadly in any relationship. In fact, the most common complaint of wives who seek marital counseling is that their husbands don't talk to them.

Communication breakdown #2 speaks, but it doesn't speak the truth. They speak, but they never confront the issues that bother them. Instead of dealing honestly with the tensions in the relationship, you keep stuffing it down until one day there isn't any more room to stuff things down. And all that anger comes back out in an almost uncontrollable rage that can do massive destruction to the relationship. It's much better to speak *the truth* in love.

Breakdown #3 is caused by speaking the truth - but not in love. Instead, truth is spoken in anger that is destructive.

"Speaking the truth in love" is the key to communicating in a way that causes us people to grow together.

### **3. LISTEN CAREFULLY**

A young man wrote to his girlfriend. "I know I proposed to you last night, but I forgot whether you said yes or no." The young lady responded, "thank you for writing. I knew I refused someone's proposal last night, but could not remember whose."

Listen carefully when the other person is talking.

*Ecclesiastes 6:11 says The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?*

Have you ever talked to someone who doesn't let you get in a word edgewise? Conversation, like relationship, is built on give and take. You say a little, then the other person responds. The other person says something, then you respond-Like playing a game of tennis. You take turns hitting the ball back and forth over the net. Each person participates in a more or less balanced conversation.

*Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry (James 1:19).*

Someone said that listening is 90% of communication, and hearing is different than listening. Hearing is a function of our physiology. Listening is something that you have to work at.

## **LEARN TO FORGIVE**

*Proverbs 10:12 "Hatred stirs up trouble but love forgives all wrongs."*

When someone makes a mistake you've got two options: rub it in or rub it out. The Bible tells us to forgive. Lack of forgiveness kills the spirit of a relationship.

**Fellowship Bible Church**

Pastor: Don Griffin

*1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.*

A pastor told the story of a couple who came to him for counseling. They were active in the church and—as far as everyone knew—happily married. Yet the wife wanted to leave her husband. She said she could no longer take the "black book."

"Show him," the wife said. Her husband reached into his pocket, pulled out a small black notebook, and handed it to the pastor. It didn't take long to see why she was so upset. Her husband had made a list of everything she had done wrong during their marriage!

In all likelihood, none of us have a black book, but we may have one in our hearts. When someone offends us, we write that thing down in our minds.

God alone has the power to help you to tear up that book and then to resist the temptation of writing a new one with new material.