

## Getting Along—God’s Advice

Most of life is about relationships. If relationships are good, almost all of life is good and happy. If a relationship turns sour that can contaminate just about everything else in life.

If you are walking through a park and see someone seated on a bench sobbing, your first thought is not that this person is in pain or that this person has just lost a lot of money from a bad investment. Probably your first thought is that some relationship has gone wrong, perhaps through a divorce or through death.

Relationships touch our lives in special and wonderful and difficult ways. As Christians we want to get those relationships right. We want to do relationships the way God wants them done. That’s why the Bible says so much about relationships, especially the most important relationships of life. The Bible includes examples of how people have done it right and how people have messed it up. So let’s look at what the Bible says about five of the most important relationships that we have.

The first and most important of these is the relationship between God and us. This relationship includes three essential ingredients: love, acceptance and love. God loves us; we respond positively and accept God’s love; we love God back again.

Probably the most familiar and most quoted verse in the entire Bible is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Unfortunately, this verse is so familiar that familiarity often breeds neglect. But what it says is astonishing. It says that God passionately and completely and irrevocably loves us. He loves us on those days when we think he doesn’t. He loves us completely at those times when we think he is distant. God is there for us every day, in every situation, and he loves us more than we could ever possibly love ourselves.

The question is: how do we respond to that astonishing love? John 1:12 tells us that “to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” In other words, we have to say “yes” to this love of God. And when we do, we become his daughters and his sons.

However, not everybody wants to be the son or daughter of God. Some people prefer to keep God at a distance. But for those who want this relationship with God, the way to get it is to accept the love of God through Jesus Christ, and then love God back again. Jesus said it well in Matthew 22:37: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” God loves us; we love God. He loves us

so fully that he was willing to give his Son for us, and we love him so fully that we willingly give our hearts and souls and minds to him.

Ah, but some will say: I knew that; in fact, I did that. I even remember the time and the circumstance where that happened. But as weeks and months and years have passed the distance between us seems to grow larger and the relationship has become cold and dry. But I’d like to get back to where it used to be. I’d like it to be what it’s supposed to be right now.

The truth is that a relationship between God and us is developed with the same essential ingredients along the way that it began with: love, acceptance and love. We must be convinced that God loves us. Then we can bask in the power and the brightness of that love. We say ‘yes’ to that love and we love God back again.

The second of life’s most important relationships is the one between wives and husbands. Ephesians 5:21-33 says it well:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and

blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and

the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Now if you’re a husband and what you just heard is that your wife is supposed to submit and respect you a

***The truth is that a relationship between God and us is developed with the same essential ingredients along the way that it began with: love, acceptance and love.***

whole lot better than she does, or if you are a wife and what you just heard is that your husband is supposed to do a much better job at loving you . . . you weren't listening! We're not supposed to be so much eavesdropping on the instructions to someone else as we are supposed to be listening to the instructions that God has given to us.

Unfortunately, this wonderful counsel from God is being ignored by a lot of people because our modern human defenses tend to rise over this "submitting" stuff. Within one generation Christians have gone from reading these words routinely in weddings and including these concepts in marriage vows to the virtual exclusion of this concept from almost all marriage vows. The issue is that we're not going to vow to submit to or obey someone else.

That raises some serious issues on what advice from God means and whether it is for all cultures and times or whether we can accept and reject on a personal basis what God has to say. So here are some points that I think can help us understand this.

Understand that the clear teaching of the Bible is that husbands and wives are both supposed to love each other, but husbands need to give extra-special attention to the way they love their wives. The Bible also clearly teaches that wives and husbands are both supposed to submit to each other, but wives need to give extra attention to the way they submit to their husbands. The point here is never that husbands are supposed to demand submission and respect or that wives are supposed to demand that their husbands be better lovers. We must listen to the advice that God has for us.

We also need to understand that this teaching is for everyday life. It is not a remedy for those difficult times when a relationship has reached meltdown and needs severe and serious intervention. I suppose you could compare it to going to the physician and saying, "I want to be a healthy person and I especially want to have a healthy heart." And the doctor says, "Okay, then there are three things I want you to do: eat a low-fat diet, take an aspirin every day and exercise regularly."

But you totally ignore that advice and ten years later you have this feeling like a large animal is sitting on your chest and pains are going down your left arm. Someone dials 9-1-1 and you are rushed to the emergency room of the local hospital. There a team of physicians and nurses surrounds you and tries to save your life. And the cardiologist says, "There are three things that I'd like you to do. I have a salad and an aspirin here that I'd like you to eat. Then run around the hospital twelve times and I'm sure you'll feel a lot better." It's kind of late for that advice. You should have been doing that for a long time on a daily basis. Now it takes something far more dramatic if, in fact, your life can be saved.

What we're talking about here is routine daily practice to preserve the relationship between a husband and

wife in order to avoid the disaster that might come later. It is not suggesting that when that relationship has reached a meltdown this kind of advice is going to become a sudden and instant cure. Instead, every day we must love each other, submit to each other and respect each other in order to grow a strong marriage relationship. But husbands especially, love your wives; and wives especially, submit to and respect your husbands.

Third on this list of life's five most important relationships is the relationship between children and parents. By the way, that is one of the most durable relationships of life. It begins at birth and extends for a lifetime. If a child dies or a parent dies, in many ways that relationship continues to significantly impact the life of the person who survives the death of the other.

Ephesians 6:1-4 says:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

God tells us all of us as children to honor our parents, to treat them with respect to their faces and to build them up rather than tear them down when they're not around. We are to be good and kind and gracious toward our parents.

Some parents wonderfully deserve that kind of respect. They are the best you could ever dream for them to be. Therefore, that kind of respect comes pretty easily. Then there are other parents who rarely warrant much if any respect or honor. To show them honor is an extremely difficult thing to do.

There's a theme that runs through all the Bible's teachings about relationships and that is that the way we behave is not dependent upon the other person. Whether someone treats us well or treats us poorly, we are to respond in a way that is most representative of the way God treats us. Therefore, no matter what, we should treat parents with honor and respect.

For young children that is especially the case in terms of obedience. But even if we are adults and our parents are old, the principle of relationship is the same. We are to do the best we can in terms of honor and respect. If our parents are dead we are to show honor and respect toward them and their memories.

God tells parents, especially fathers, not to exasperate their children. Frankly, some parents—and some fathers in particular—are good at exasperating their children. They're too demanding. They're too controlling. They're manipulative. And, tragically, they don't offer very much encouragement. We need to understand that a word of praise from a father is one of the greatest blessings that someone can receive in a lifetime. It is enor-

mously powerful.

Benjamin West was an American-born artist in the 1700 and 1800s. He was born in the United States, although he moved to Europe and become quite famous, especially in England. He became the artist of history, appointed by King George III, and was the co-founder of the Royal Academy of Arts and the second president of the Royal Academy of Arts.

When he was a young boy, one day his mother left him at home in charge of his little sister. As children often do when they are without adult supervision, he started exploring. He opened the desk drawers and there found bottles of colored permanent ink. He took them out, found some paper and decided he was going to paint a portrait of his baby sister, Sally. In the process, he splattered the permanent ink over the furniture and carpet and made a colossal mess.

When his mother came home and saw the mess she had to make a parental decision. She picked up the paper on which young Benjamin had been drawing and she said, "Why, it's Sally!" Then she bent over and kissed her young son. For the rest of his life, Benjamin West said, "My mother's kiss made me an artist."

She got it. She understood the power of encouragement rather than exasperating. That's not to say that parents should condone what is wrong. It's not saying there should be no discipline. But it is saying that a right parent/child relationship needs to be guided by God. That no matter how old you are, children, honor your parents; and parents, encourage your children.

Fourth on this list of life's most important relationships is the relationship between employees and employers. In the first century in the Roman Empire that was mostly a relationship between masters and slaves.

Please understand that the Bible does not promote slavery. Never! However, it does recognize that slavery was a tragic part of that and other cultures. What the Bible often does under such circumstances is to give instruction and advice on how we are to live even in situations that should not be. So it is in that context that I come to the conclusion that if this will work in slavery, it will certainly work in North America in employee/employer relationships.

Ephesians 6:5-9 says:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever

good he does, whether he's a slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

In other words, God doesn't recognize human slavery and he makes no distinction between a slave and a master.

When we translate this for today it says that when you go to work, do what your boss says. Do a terrific job. Be a good employee whether the boss is looking or not, whether the boss ever finds out or not. Have a good attitude in your heart. Even if the boss is like a slave master, you still have a good attitude. And the way to do that is to go to work every day and think, "I'm really working for Jesus Christ. He's my real boss. I'm doing this for him."

Sometimes it's hard to show respect to a boss who doesn't warrant respect. When the Minnesota North Stars hockey team was moved from Minnesota to Dallas, Charleen and I attended the last North Stars game at the old Met Center. It was a chapter in Minnesota sports history when there was a less than positive attitude toward the owner of the North Stars. In fact, there was a chant that used his name with a very derogatory word attached to it. Throughout that last North Stars game thousands of people continuously shouted this derogatory chant.

At that time there were a number of North Stars families who were Wooddalers and they didn't want to move to Dallas. Their roots were here; their relationships were here. But they didn't have any say because the owner of the team just decided and did it. The wife of one of the North Stars was driving her car filled with her children and their friends when they broke out into this chant, saying his name and this derogatory description. She turned to be quiet. She said that the person whose name they were speaking is the employer of her husband and the employer of the children's father and that in

that car and in that family his name would always be spoken with honor and with respect. She got it right! Even slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

But maybe you're the boss and you're a Christian. Then treat your employees well. Do not threaten them since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with him. Don't ever think that you're better than somebody else because you're the boss. That's simply not true. Remember that God is the ultimate boss and always treat those who work for you with respect, even if they don't deserve it.

***Whether someone treats us well or treats us poorly, we are to respond in a way that is most representative of the way God treats us.***

Now there's something I think needs to be interjected here. Maybe you know this and maybe I don't need to say it, but I'm afraid that somebody might not get it. What if your boss asks you to do something that's illegal or immoral or something that obviously a Christian should never do? Are you supposed to do it just because you know you should do what your boss tells you to do? Well, of course not!

The same goes for parents and children and husbands and wives. None of this is license for someone to demand of us something illegal or immoral or totally inappropriate. Yet, we still treat other people with respect even when they don't deserve that respect. We bend over as far as we can in order to comply with their expectations. We do our very best. We are willing to go the distance in order to do what is right to make a relationship good.

Last in our list of life's most important relationships is between citizens and government. If you've heard all that has gone before you probably don't need to hear what is said in Romans because it's consistent in all these relationships. Don't worry about what the other person does; treat others the way God has treated you. Do what is right! Romans 13:1-7 says:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

These words were written to people in the first century Roman Empire who were under a government where women had no rights, where infanticide was legal, where every day babies were routinely left outside to die, especially female babies. It was a government that condoned and enforced slavery. Sometimes slaves were treated horribly. This was a government where divorce became so rampant that marriage, as an institution, virtually dis-

appeared in many parts of the empire during the first and second centuries. And taxes were often excessive and unjust. And this is the advice on how to live under those circumstances?

Is this saying that we are supposed to condone the Hitlers and the Stalins of history? Of course not! Yet Christians are encouraged to give to the government and to politicians the benefit of the doubt, to give respect and honor and payment of taxes. Christians are not those who bad-mouth the government and politicians. We are the best citizens that we can possibly be.

And if we as Christians are part of the government—routine today, but a rarity in the first century—we need to listen up because God is saying that we are his agents to accomplish what is good and right in our country and within society.

God and us; wives and husbands; children and parents; employees and employers; citizens and government: now we know what God wants us to do. But we still have questions. How does this fit with my situation? Where do I start? We start by doing what God asks us to do. And after that he will explain to us what to do next.

But what if we don't know where he wants us to start? How are we going to get to the next place we need to be? God wants us to have the best possible relationships, so we begin with what we know God is asking us to do in order to have the relationships that God calls us to have.

Father, I pray that you will bless us in all of our relationships. Be our teacher, our strength and our helper. I pray especially for those who are in difficult relationships, who are facing the hardest of times. I pray that you will give to them your extraordinary grace. And may we be totally Christian in all the relationships we have. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

*Faith Matters*® is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
©Leith Anderson