

10 KEYS TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”(John 17:20–21)

On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus did not just pray for His nearby disciples. He was praying for those who would someday believe through their witness. That’s another way of saying Jesus was praying for us! Jesus’ prayer centered on oneness, the same kind of relational harmony that He and Father enjoy. He asked God to help us become a people of one mind with Himself and with each other.

Notice the “result clause” from verse 20: “*So that the world may believe that You sent me.*” As we become a people living in harmony with Him and each other, our witness becomes credible. The world can’t help but see that Jesus is real, that He is the One who makes such unity possible.

So how can we grow our oneness in Christ? God’s Word has the answer. From it, we can identify ten principles for healthy relationships. Use all ten to become a people who are an answer to Jesus prayer! As you do, you will give a watching world reason to affirm that there is no explanation for our unity except this: Jesus truly is God’s Son sent here to show us the way!

Pastor Jim Fleming

MY COMMITMENTS

As a member of the body of Christ and in complete dependence upon God, I do hereby make a solemn covenant to faithfully follow the biblical principles for promoting healthy and edifying relationships. Further, I will be accountable to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for my faithfulness to these commitments.

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1. I will daily live for Father's pleasure.
2. I will daily seek Father's instruction in His Word.
3. I will daily ask for His help in prayer.

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4. I will check my tongue.
5. I will get the facts.
6. I will use my words to encourage and bring out the best in others.
7. I will go direct and minister grace to one with whom I need to reconcile.
8. I will humbly receive instruction from another.
9. I will deploy the twin graces of confession and forgiveness.
10. I will embrace personal cost to protect our unity.

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GET PRACTICAL

Commitments 1-3 promote healthy relationships by encouraging personal growth. Purposing to live for God's pleasure, to spend time in His Word, and to engage in prayer on a daily basis will promote spiritual vitality that sustains healthy relationships. Think of these as everyday commitments, kind of like vitamins. But commitments 4-10 are for special circumstances. Think of them as fire extinguishers. When the power of sin to damage relationships ignites, use these commitments to effectively douse the flames. They are arranged in a logical order, so apply them in sequence.

#1: GODLINESS

Healthy relationships can only be built on a foundation of personal godliness.

As a matter of first importance, I commit myself to the pursuit of continued progress and growth in my faith. I do this in the knowledge that I will only be fruitful and useful to others as I am faithful to maintain and deepen my own walk with the Lord.

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self control, and in your self control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

GET PRACTICAL

There are four elements God uses to help us grow: **C**ircumstances, **W**ord, **P**ray, and **E**ncouragement of Fellow Believers. God is in charge of the first. But we decide whether we will study His Word, pray, and develop edifying relationships. As we do, we will grow. If we don't, we will lose ground spiritually and hurt those around us. So if you want to build healthy relationships, it starts right here: Give daily attention to growing your walk with God.

#2: WORD-DEVOTION

Healthy relationships are structured according to biblical principle.

I will use the Bible as the point of reference for everything I think, say, and do. I will cultivate my ability to view all things through the lens of God's Word and to handle all relational issues according to biblical principle.

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Your words. My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word (Psa. 119:147-148).

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the Lord, I have taught you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer him who sent you? (Prov. 22:17-21).

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (James. 1:22).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

GET PRACTICAL

Here's a quick and easy process you can use to get intentional about growth: 1. Pick an area where you want to grow. It might concern your thoughts, your words, or your actions. 2. Get a journal and start collecting verses that give insight into the area you want to change. Hunt for "nuggets" through relevant books of the Bible. Ask friends for their favorites. 3. Ask God to show you exactly what you need to change, learn, or apply in light of the truth you're collecting. 4. Then do it! Stay with it.

#3: PRAYER

Healthy relationships are sustained by earnest prayer.

I humbly acknowledge the completeness of my dependence upon God and commit myself to faithfulness in prayer for God's blessing on our church and on each other.

Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God (Psalm 20:7).

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight (Prov. 15:8).

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts (Zech. 4:6).

“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matt. 21:22).

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God (Acts 12:5).

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints (Eph. 6:18).

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension (1 Tim. 2:8).

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16).

GET PRACTICAL

God likes it when we ask for His help. He especially likes it when we ask for help doing things He wants us to do. This kind of prayer is actually a form of worship! We are affirming that He is our difference maker. So where do you need God to make a difference in your service to Him? Your growth in Him? Your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Go ahead and ask Him for His help! He is willing to give you abundant grace and mercy, but is waiting to be asked.

#4: RESTRAINT

Healthy relationships are preserved by thoughtful restraint of one's tongue.

I will practice the art of restraint and care in the use of words. I oppose the urge to say the first thing that comes to mind. I will carefully consider what I say before I say it that I might impart life and health with my words. When I overhear something that gives me pause, concern, or that raises questions, I will not repeat what I have overheard or discuss it with a third party. I will hold my tongue.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life (Prov. 10:11).

Where there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise (Prov. 10:19).

The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding (Prov. 10:21).

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter (Prov. 11:13).

The fool's vexation is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor (Prov. 12:16).

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Prov. 12:18).

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge skillfully, but the mouth of the fool spouts folly (Prov. 15:2).

The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things (Prov. 15:28).

The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds persuasiveness to his lips (Prov. 16:23).

A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind (Prov. 18:2).

He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles (Prov. 21:23).

Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances (Prov. 25:11).

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down (Prov. 26:20).

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Prov. 29:20).

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another (Gal. 5:15).

If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless (James 1:26).

But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison (James 3:8).

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door (James 5:9).

GET PRACTICAL

The Bible wouldn't have so many warnings about the tongue if it weren't a major problem. It is so easy to react with your mouth. When you do, the odds are quite high you will make things worse. When someone says or does wrong by you, do not respond with the first thing that comes to your lips. Hold your tongue and move on to commitment #5. You will use your words later, but not before well using your ears and mind first.

#5: TRUTHFULNESS

Healthy relationships are grounded in a tenacious commitment to the truth.

I commit to pursuing, thinking, acting on, and speaking the truth. Perceptions, no matter how strongly felt, are no substitute for the truth. I will get the facts, direct from the source. I will not deliberate until I have listened to whatever needs to be heard. I will reject what is false. My judgments shall be just and impartial and grounded in what is true.

Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue (Psalm 120:2).

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter (Prov. 11:13).

An evildoer listens to wicked lips, a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue (Prov. 17:4).

A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind (Prov. 18:2).

He who answers before he hears, it is folly and shame to him (Prov. 18:13).

The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him (Prov. 18:17).

Loyalty and truth preserve the king, and he upholds his throne by righteousness (Prov. 20:28).

I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (James 1:19).

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (James 2:10).

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality (1 Tim. 5:21).

For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit" (1 Pet. 3:10).

GET PRACTICAL

Whenever the sin of one against another threatens our unity, our first response must be to reach for the truth. Think of truth as a fire retardant when lies, slander, gossip, and playing favorites are fanning the flames. Has someone said or done something that has hurt you? Go direct and ask questions from the relevant party to confirm exactly what was said or done. When you can summarize what happened and get a response like this, "Yes, that is what I said (or did)," then the process of reconciliation will begin from the right starting point.

#6: DEVOTION

Healthy relationships are protected through loving devotion to each other.

I pledge to support my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in brotherly love. I will help them do the right thing, I will seek to bring out the best in them, and I will encourage them to do what is right. When someone comes to me voicing disagreements with another, I will encourage the person involved to go direct to the source. I refuse to function as an intermediary or representative of other's criticisms or concerns. I am committed to building an environment where other members of the team and those we seek to serve are encouraged and excited about serving the Lord, not discouraged, criticized, or beat down. My words will impart life to and nourish those around me. My peers will find my presence and my words an asset to doing what is right.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life (Prov. 10:11).

The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding (Prov. 10:21).

A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends (Prov. 16:28).

He who has a crooked mind finds no good, and he who is perverted in his language falls into evil (Prov. 17:20).

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down (Prov. 26:20).

“But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43).

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, give preference to one another in honor (Rom. 12:10).

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Rom. 14:19).

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:7).

Do all things without grumbling or disputing (Phil. 2:14).

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:15).

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29).

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as also you are doing...encourage the fainthearted (1 Thess. 5:11, 14).

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:24-25).

Do not speak against one another, brethren (James 4:11).

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door (James 5:9).

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say (3 John 9).

These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. ... These are the ones who cause divisions (Jude 16, 19).

GET PRACTICAL

You have held your tongue and sought the truth. Excellent! Now it's time to affirm the right goal: Your intention is to bring out the best in someone else. So, even when you have been wronged by someone else, adopt the posture of a servant. Say to yourself, "My goal is to serve the best interests of others, even those who have hurt me. I need to respond in a way that promotes Jesus' agenda for those around me." Then ask Jesus to help you promote the true good of someone else.

#7: GRACIOUSNESS

Healthy relationships thrive when I minister grace.

When I am aware of something that another needs to hear, I will not belittle or slander him to others. I will go to him and speak to him both gently and directly about the issue. I will measure my approach to my brother or sister and frame my words in such a way that it gives him/her every advantage to respond well. I will use my words to impart grace to my brother or sister, even when they have blown it. I will emulate Father by speaking the truth, but doing so with love and grace.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29).

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col. 4:6).

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children (1 Thess. 2:7).

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Remind them...to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men (Tit. 3:1-2).

GET PRACTICAL

Do you genuinely desire to promote the best interests of another? Even though they may have done wrong by you, will you choose to give them grace? Grace is what defines your relationship with Father, so let it define how you relate to others. Here's how: Choose words, tone of speech, and manner that gives another maximum opportunity to respond positively to your appeal to make things right. Ask yourself, "Is what I plan to say gracious, is my manner gentle, and is my tone kind? If someone came to me and said what I plan to say, would his manner make it easy for me to do the right thing?"

#8: HUMILITY

Healthy relationships excel through humble teachability.

I will resist pride and the critical spirit that go with it. I will defer to my fellow brothers and sisters in humility and a godly teachability in all things. I want to understand and do what God desires more than I want to be right or look good.

Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning (Prov. 9:8-9).

The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be thrown down (Prov. 10:8).

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom (Prov. 11:2).

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid (Prov. 12:1).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel (Prov. 12:15).

The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility (Prov. 15:33).

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:3-8).

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

GET PRACTICAL

Logs first, specks second! Jesus is quite clear about this: “*First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye*” (Matt. 7:5). You won’t be of much help to a brother or sister unless you have first dealt with your own sin. Get God’s help! Ask Him to show you ways in which you have not done what is right, and then confess your sin to Him. Thank Him for forgiving you! If you have sinned against someone else, ask for their forgiveness, too. Make sure you have a clean slate with God and with others BEFORE you try to help someone else.

#9: RECONCILIATION

Healthy relationships use restoration to neutralize the effects of sin.

I refuse to harbor a root of bitterness, anger, or festering disappointment with another and thus undercut our unity. I commit to keep short accounts with one another and deal in love with whatever has the power to divide us. I will humbly confess my sin to those against whom I have sinned. I will freely and fully forgive any who have offended me.

There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers (Prov. 6:16-19).

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions (Prov. 10:12).

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matt. 18:15).

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:21-22).

“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35).

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you (Col. 3:12-13).

See to it...that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled (Heb. 12:15).

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16).

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead (1 Peter 3:8-9).

GET PRACTICAL

If you have made good on the previous eight commitments, you are in just the right place to help someone else who has sinned against you. Here's what to do: ~~1~~ Go to him. ~~2~~ Use Scripture to help him see what he did from God's perspective. ~~3~~ Help him say to God and, if necessary, to you, "Here is what I have done, there is no excuse, it was wrong, will you forgive me?" ~~4~~ Say, "I am choosing, in light of God's grace to me, to forgive you. I am choosing to deny what you did the power to adversely affect our relationship. You have a clean slate." ~~5~~ Then pray for your brother or sister, saying, "Thank you for your grace, Father. You have forgiven us and given us the power to admit our sin and to forgive each other."

#10: ONENESS

Healthy relationships stand against whatever threatens our oneness in Christ.

I will value unity more than having my own way. My countenance, my words, and my actions will demonstrate a tenacious commitment to maintaining the same mind and same purpose. I am devoted to working together with my peers.

A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends (Prov. 16:28).

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down (Prov. 26:20).

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and are you not walking like mere men (1 Cor. 3:3).

Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Cor. 13:11).

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:2-5).

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members (James 4:1).

These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. ...These are the ones who cause divisions (Jude 16, 19).

GET PRACTICAL

If you have put all the previous commitments in place, there is one more thing you need to know. Healthy relationships don't just happen. It requires work and sacrifice to maintain them. Without that work and sacrifice, we will fall into old habits, act like mere men, and tear each other down. So here's what you can do to be pro-active and follow Jesus' example. ☞☞Decide at the beginning of each day that you want to stay on the same page with your brothers and sisters in Christ MORE than you want to have your own way. ☞☞Then, during the day, find one place where you can sacrifice something in order to promote someone else's good. It doesn't need to be something big, but it does need to be something real. Get in the habit of making sacrifices to promote others' good, and you'll be making great progress.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Jesus lived and died to restore a healthy relationship with us! *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).* Jesus became poor so that we might one day look in the face of the One who has every reason to write us off. This is our future in Christ: *And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:3-4).*

In all things, we follow Jesus when we regard others as more important than ourselves. Do this and our relationships with each other will flourish! Do this and Jesus will smile when we see Him face-to-face.