

# Inspirational Nuggets

(Archived posts from [www.discipleshipcenter.org](http://www.discipleshipcenter.org))

## **RELATIONSHIPS:**

Many years ago, a Christian author by the name of Jon Johnston was listening to a sermon by a Nazarene minister named Earl Lee. Lee was a former missionary to India, and had a son who had been held hostage in Iran around 1979. During this particular sermon, Rev. Lee was speaking on a powerful theme: "Walls or Bridges?" In short, Rev. Lee said that all we do or say builds either walls or bridges between ourselves and others.

This got Jon Johnston thinking about the importance of relationships, to the point that he ended up writing a book entitled ***"Walls or Bridges: How to Build Relationships That Glorify God."***

**All that we do or say builds either walls or bridges with others - how are you doing at bridge building today?**

## **RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM (part 1):**

What is it that comes to your mind when you hear the word "fellowship"? Someone once loosely explained it as "a bunch of fellows on the same ship." A deeper definition, from *A Dictionary of the Bible and Christian Doctrine in Everyday English*, defines fellowship as "sharing or taking part in a common love or friendship."

Randy Southern, in his book entitled *The World's Easiest Guide for New Believers*, speaks of relationships from the perspective of fellowship. He maintains that, even if you have found a church home, you are not guaranteed automatic fellowship any more than enrolling at college guarantees an automatic education. So, how does one go about cultivating fellowship with fellow Christians? Randy has three suggestions for us, and I'd like to take the next three "nuggets" to share those suggestions with you.

Randy's first suggestion on cultivating fellowship is this: **MINGLE**. (Reminds me of an old line from a Three Stooges picture, in which the Stooges are at a party and Moe threatens Larry and Curly by saying: "Mingle, or I'll mangle!" Let's hope fellowship doesn't come to that!)

Here's more from Mr. Southern about mingling: "In order to enjoy the kind of fellowship God has in mind for His people, you need to learn to invest yourself in the life of others. The first step is no more complicated than hanging around after Sunday School or the worship service to introduce yourself to others. Spend at least a few minutes each week getting to know your fellow worshipers."

**What efforts are you willing to make, as a way to get to know your fellow Christians better?**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM (part 2):**

The previous "nugget" looked at Randy Southern's helpful hints at facilitating the growth of fellowship in the Kingdom of God as he wrote in his book *The World's Easiest Guide for New Believers*.

The first suggestion was: **MINGLE**.

The second suggestion is: **GET INVOLVED** - "Expand your personal involvement in church. Increase your allotment of weekly "church time" from an hour or so to 3 or 4 hours or more. Clear your schedule for picnics, potlucks, fun fairs, family nights, concerts, or any other fellowship opportunities your church offers . . . *The more quality time you spend with people, the closer you will grow to them. The closer you grow to people, the more opportunities for fellowship you have. The more fellowship you have with fellow believers, the stronger your relationship with Christ becomes.*"

*Helpful hints:* If you do not see enough applicable opportunities for fellowship at church, *create some!* Invite someone to your home, or out for a cup of coffee, or to a meal after church. Your Sunday School class may provide a list of prospective individuals, to start with. *Or, choose to be a part of a Christian service effort with the church.* It was on an all-church work day, during my days in Seminary, that I got to know Dan Straley a lot better. On seeing him at worship services, before that work day, he always looked so aloof and serious. I didn't think I could ever have fellowship with Dan. But then, during the work day, I found that he had a great sense of humor, a winning smile, and was quite a blessing to be around. That one time of fellowship, experienced through the all-church work day, changed my relationship with Dan, and for the better! *And, don't wait for others to initiate fellowship opportunities with you . . . you should be the one to get things underway!*

**What deliberate efforts are you making to create fellowship opportunities with people at your church?**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM- (part 3):**

The previous two "nuggets" looked at Randy Southern's helpful hints at facilitating the growth of fellowship in the Kingdom of God as he wrote in his book *The World's Easiest Guide for New Believers*. He provides several steps we can take for initiating fellowship and giving it a chance to grow.

The first step was: **MINGLE** (spend a few minutes each week getting to know your fellow worshippers).

The second step was **GET INVOLVED** (expand your personal involvement in the church, so you can spend more quality time with people, and have opportunity to grow closer to them).

Randy Southern's third step for initiating fellowship is this: **MAKE YOURSELF VULNERABLE.** He says: "The key ingredient to developing relationships of depth - not to mention fellowship that can change lives - is openness. Openness involves sharing concerns, questions, doubts, past failures, and goals. With openness comes vulnerability, and with vulnerability comes uneasiness. You'll want to be careful not to be too open too quickly . . . take a few tentative steps, get some reaction, and then take a few more steps. (And) when people open up to you, reward them with your full attention."

Vulnerability is a tough thing for many of us to attempt, especially with the threat of getting hurt by others as we make ourselves vulnerable. In the next "nugget" I want to share a few brief reasons why we must choose to be vulnerable, despite the possibility of hurt.

**In which fellowship settings will you choose to share concerns, questions, doubts, past failures and goals?**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM- (part 4):**

This post will conclude our look at fellowship and relationships in God's Kingdom from Randy Southern's book *The World's Easiest Guide for New Believers*. The previous nugget issued the challenge to "make yourself vulnerable," as a way to help initiate fellowship and develop relationships of depth. For many, fears connected with vulnerability cause them to choose not to be vulnerable. Perhaps you know of someone who is not attending church these days because "someone in the church hurt me." They have chosen isolation rather than risking vulnerability.

I would speak out in favor of taking a chance on vulnerability, if that is what it takes to increase fellowship in our churches and help develop deeper relationships. I have chosen to practice "wise vulnerability" in these years of my life, and have decided to keep trying to build fellowship with others - and here are some reasons why:

1. *If fears connected with vulnerability caused me to withdraw from God's people, then I would feel that I am not fulfilling God's plan to interact meaningfully with His people.* There are so many verses in the Bible that call for the intersections of our lives together, and to not "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25).
2. *I have chosen the perspective of "it's not about me" when it comes to interacting with God's people.* Rather, I take seriously the command to "serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13C). I will put you first by serving you, even if it means I become vulnerable to hurt in the process.
3. *I have come to realize that every relationship worth having involves some degree of vulnerability.* In fact, there have been several occasions across the years, in my family or with my marriage, where I feel I have experienced situations of hurt, but I

am still very much committed to my wife and my family. Part of that continued commitment involves the practice of doing what it says in Colossians 3:13b: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

4. *To me, the benefits of being vulnerable and building fellowship outweigh the risks.* True, I have encountered some very difficult moments in churches I have been a part of, but when I think of how God has been able to work through me to help others, and how much God's people have blessed me at various times, it is enough to make me want to take risks and keep on connecting with God's people.

**If someone you know confesses that they are ready to stop going to church because they have been hurt, how will you respond to them?**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM:**

Here is a brief story, and comments, from Richard Halverson's book entitled *A Living Fellowship - A Dynamic Witness*:

*We were traveling to a leadership seminar in Boston. A member of our team, an African American brother, handed me a copy of **Ebony** magazine, opened to an article on black-white coalition movements in history. The author traced the progress of various coalitions since before the Civil War, discussed their failures and the reasons for them. One of his conclusions: "Coalitions cannot be negotiated, they must be forged . . ." He described forging as involving the hammer and heat. Human relationships are not automatic, they involve struggle. But it is the struggle that seasons and strengthens the relationship. Love, to be strong, requires exercise.*

*Commitment to the priority of persons enables you to go through the struggles and discover deepened, strengthened relationships . . . Pay the price and your reward is a fellowship which is inseparable and invincible.*

**We all want to enjoy great relationships in the church. Are you willing to work at those relationships, so you can enjoy meaningful fellowship?**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM:**

Here is a quick Scriptural reminder of why we really do need relationships in God's Kingdom (even if you might feel like you haven't had a lot of success in that area yet!) --

Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their work:  
If one falls down,  
his friend can help him up.  
But pity the man who falls,  
and has no one to help him up!

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone? (*Maybe this can be connected to warmth of hearts and relationships, too!*)

Though one may be overpowered,  
two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

**Ask God to give you 2 or 3 friends that you can be a blessing to, in the ways mentioned in these verses (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).**

### **RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM:**

A short course in Human Relations –

The least important word: **I** (*Philippians 2:3*)

The most important word: **We** (*Philippians 2:2, 4*)

The two most important words: **Thank you!** (*I Thessalonians 5:18*)

The three most important words: **All is forgiven!** (*Colossians 3:13*)

The four most important words: **What is your opinion?**

(*Exodus 18:3-19a, for example*)

The five most important words: **You did a good job!** (*Romans 14:10, 19 - verses that take us in the direction of understanding others*)

**Which of these phrases does God need to help you use more often?**

### **RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM:**

As disciples of Christ, when we think about Relationships in God's Kingdom, let's never forget to work on the relationships in our immediate family.

John Maxwell, in his book entitled *Relationships 101*, gives these words of wisdom regarding how to cope with difficulties that arise in the home, between family members:

1. **Attack the problem, never the person** - Remember, you are all on the same side. So don't take your frustrations out on people. Instead, attack the problem.
2. **Get all the facts** - Nothing can cause more damage than jumping to false conclusions during a crisis. Before you try to find solutions, be sure you know what's really going on.
3. **List all the options** - This may sound a bit analytical, but it really helps because you can look at emotional subjects with some objectivity. Besides, if you had a problem at work, you would probably be willing to go through this process.
4. **Choose the best solution** - As you decide on a solution, always remember that people are your priority. Make your choices accordingly.

5. **Look for the positives in the problem** - The tough things give us a chance to grow (James 1:2-4). No matter how bad things look at the moment, just about everything has something positive that comes from it.
6. **Never withhold love** - Sure, tell your family how you feel. Acknowledge the problems. But continue loving family members unconditionally through it all. "...Love one another deeply, from the heart" (I Peter 1:22).

**"Lord, may Your grace, love, and wisdom always be flowing into my relationships with my family."**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD'S KINGDOM:**

Lubricants are a wonderful thing. If you don't believe me, then recall some squeaky door hinges that you have heard across your years. Those hinges drive us nuts, with all the efficiency of fingernails on a chalkboard. It's always a good thing when someone finally decides to add a lubricant like WD-40 or 3-In-1 oil to those squeaking hinges, and helps formerly combatant metals have a common ground to work upon, without further audible fuss.

As I have watched God's people across the years, I have become more and more thankful for something I would like to refer to as "**the grease of grace.**" One definition of *grace* is "*God's ability to help us do what we could not do on our own.*" We often think of grace in a "vertical" fashion, as in "Amazing Grace," in which God brings us a relationship with Himself through salvation (a salvation we could have never produced on our own). But I think there is also a "horizontal" aspect of grace, in which God enables us to love, care for, encourage, and get along well with each other. I think Romans 12:6b-8 speaks of this, in which Paul calls upon Christians to use their spiritual gifts to help each other in marvelous ways. But don't forget the foundation laid in Romans 12:6a - "We have different gifts, according to the GRACE given us."

Without this kind of grace, we could never have the kind of peaceful, caring, and uplifting relationships that God wants us to have in His family. Where this "grease of grace" is not evident, you have a church with people who are often at odds with each other (worse than fingernails on a blackboard!). Where the "grease of grace" is freely dispensed, you have the kind of church that people can't wait to be part of.

**Oh God, please pour out Your 'grease of grace' on our lives today, for the sake of relationships with people we know."**