

“THE HABITS OF A LOVING HEART”

Building Great Relationships - Part 9 of 9

1 Corinthians 13:7

September 21, 2008

For nine weeks we have talked about relationships. If you practice everything we've talked about, you'll find that love is exhausting. It costs and it exhausts. It's work to be a loving person. Sometime we don't feel like loving. Have you ever felt like you just had no more love to give? If you're in a people intensive business, teachers, salesmen, managers, nurses, waitress, and on and on, you know what it's like to come home and say, "I can't look at another person! I can't face another problem, demand, heartache. I just can't!"

1 Corinthians 13 *"Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, it never fails."* The Phillips translation says, *"Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading to its hope. It can really outlast anything."* Where do we get that kind of love? How do we love over the long haul without running dry? How can our love be renewed, because my love dries up? Where do we get the kind of love that always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres?

In NASCAR I think the pit stops are amazing. New tires and fuel in a matter of seconds. And sometimes the time spent in the pit is the difference between winning and losing. Occasionally a driver will take the chance that he can finish without refueling. And often they run out of fuel and they are finished. In a long race, we've got to refuel. In a long relationship, to make love last, we have to know how to refuel the love in our life, because if we don't refuel, our relationships are going to crash and burn. We need a love that will last.

If we want to refuel a loving heart, there are three habits we need to develop.

1. Develop the Habits That Refresh Me Physically

Our physical condition has a strong impact on our relationships, and on our ability to love. It's hard to love when we're tired. We get irritable; short tempered. Our physical condition makes a difference. In a lot of marriages, all that is needed is some rest. We're worn out. There are warning signs like always feeling fatigued, too tired to care, depending on stimulants like caffeine or even something more. We need to get some rest because it takes energy to listen to people, to put their needs first. Have you ever tried to appear like you're interested in your child when you're dead tired? You don't have the energy to listen.

What happens to our relationships when we're run down? Little issues become big problems. We're more cranky, defensive, critical. A lot of people are grouchier on Mondays because they've done too much over the weekend and they're tired. They need more rest. So what sort of habits are going to refresh us physically? Here's an idea. Let's look at God's owners manual, the Bible. The Old Testament has healthy principles to help us get the proper rest, a balanced diet, and regular exercise. It's nothing new, we just need to do it.

A. Rest. Psalm 127:2 *"It's senseless for you to work so hard from early morning till late at night. God wants you to get your proper rest."* Some of you need to put that on your

briefcase and/or your calendar. Rest is so important that it's in the Ten Commandments. Every seventh day we rest. If you're not taking a day off every week, you're breaking the commandments. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is to just get some rest. It's amazing how much better things look after a good night's sleep. Some of you may be too tired to love your kids or your spouse. That lack of love is not a spiritual problem but a physical one. We need habits that keep us physically refreshed.

B. Balanced diet. *"You made my body, Lord, now give me the sense to heed your laws."* (Psalm 119:73) We know the type of diet we should follow. We just need to do it.

C. Regular exercise. *"Honor the Lord with your body."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Our bodies were made to be active. In Bible times they didn't have to exercise because they walked everywhere. They did physical work. But we have a sedentary life and we drive everywhere. Jackie Gleason said, "Whenever I get the urge to exercise, I lay down until it goes away."

The bottom line is that we really only have two choices: fatigue or fitness. We're going to have one or the other. To be fit, we have to exercise. Studies show that exercise increases our energy. One benefit of sleep walking is we can get our rest and exercise at the same time. Not really, but I do believe that if some couples would just get in shape, their love would return. They would be refreshed and renewed. Now, we're just too tired to love each other.

2. Develop the Habits That Recharge Me Emotionally.

When our emotional tank is empty we're unable to keep on loving. And so we just give up. It is emotional fatigue that comes because our emotional tank is empty. Now we know when we need recharged physically. The stomach growls. Eyelids get heavy. But we often overlook the signs that say our emotional tank is empty. And what are those signs? A sense of being overwhelmed, feeling inadequate; having a short fuse, and a tendency to have outbursts of impatience. When our emotional tank is low we tend to get angry at the people we love the most. We avoid people because we see them as problems. We have no desire to love people when our emotional tank is low. We dream of getting away, to escape to the mountains or the ocean. We're always thinking about it. David had this problem. He said, *"If I had the wings of a dove, I'd fly away."* (Psalm 55:6) That's a big sign that we're emotionally empty. Astronaut Jim Erwin was asked, "What does it take to be an astronaut?" He said, "First you need the incredible urge to get away from it all!"

To keep on loving, we need to recharge physically and emotionally. And if we're not recharging, it's going to have a negative affect on our relationships. But how do we do that? Again, three suggestions from the Word of God.

A. Solitude. We need time alone. In a Peanuts episode Charlie Brown and Linus were talking about an uncle's stress test when Linus asked, "Have you ever had a stress test?" And Charlie Brown answers, "No, but I live in one." Ever feel that way? Jesus did. And so He would often withdraw from the crowds. He would get away when He needed to recharge emotionally. The people who are available all the time aren't worth much when they are available.

Mark 6:31 “*So many people were coming and going Jesus said to them ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’*” There was so much hustle and bustle, that Jesus told them that they needed a break. They needed some time off. Sometimes they went to the mountains. Other times to the desert. Now if you think that’s a Biblical justification to go to Las Vegas, I think you’re on weak theological ground. But Jesus did say, “*Come apart for a while.*” The truth is we can either *come apart for a while*, or we will just *come apart*. We need solitude.

B. Recreation. I often think of it as re-creation because there are some activities that recharge our emotions, our energy and our enthusiasm for life. They make us feel better. But those activities are not the same for everyone because we are all different. Maybe it’s a hobby, a sport, a craft, games. Experiment to find out what recharges you emotionally. We need to make time for that, whatever it is. I like to get out on a golf course and often I am alone so I can get both solitude and re-creation. I’m also alone because I’m not very good and I hit a lot of balls where no one else is around. But find out what works for you.

Matthew 11:19: “*Jesus came enjoying life.*” He enjoyed life. He was the most intensive, ministry oriented person who ever lived and He enjoyed life. The more we’re involved in intensive ministry, the more we’re involved in helping people, the more critical our need for play time. That’s because ministry costs and it exhausts. When we’re helping people, counseling, encouraging, supervising, serving, whatever, when we’re giving out to others it costs and it exhausts. We need play time.

C. Laughter. Proverbs 17:22 “*Being cheerful keeps you healthy.*” Studies have shown that when we laugh, it increases the number of T-cells which raises our immunity level. It’s good for our health. Laughter produces endorphins in the brain. Humor is beneficial. It is God’s gift. And Psalm 59 tells us that God laughs. We need laughter to re-charge and rebuild our love. Have you ever said, “Someday I’ll look back at this and laugh”? Why wait? Why not just laugh right now? The stupidity of the arguments, the conflicts, the stress. Laugh at it now because laughter lightens the burdens we carry. To love people over the long haul, we need to recharge ourselves emotionally with habits like solitude, recreation and laughter.

3. Develop the Habits That Renew Me Spiritually.

1 Corinthians 13:7 tells us that real love always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. It never gives up. It can outlast anything. We can’t love people that way without God’s help. We just can’t. We cannot love people the way God loves us, the way we’ve talked about the last nine weeks, because without God’s power in our life, our human love runs out. Warning signs of a spiritual burnout: when nothing seems to be worth the effort; when life seems futile, without purpose; blaming God for our problems when we have brought them on ourselves. The heroes of the Bible blamed God when they were in the state of burn out. David, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah. 1 Timothy 4:8 “*Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.*” But again we ask ‘How’? By building these three habits.

A. A daily quiet time. Spend time alone with God where God talks to us through scripture and we talk to God through prayer. Nothing will help you more. 2 Corinthians 4:16 “*This is*

the reason we never lose heart. Our body does suffer wear and tear but every day the inward man receives fresh strength.” Outwardly our body suffers wear and tear. But inwardly we can be renewed every day by spending time alone with God.

The Upper Room and other devotionals are a great place to start. Pick a regular time and place to sit down to read and pray. Maybe in your home or out in nature. Maybe sitting alone, not driving but sitting in your car. But spend some time every day. Read the Bible and/or a devotional and think about what you’ve read and how it touches your life. Maybe write some things down. It is a habit that will make a difference and keep you spiritually renewed. Remember to “*Cast all your cares on God for He cares for you.*” (1 Peter 5:7) In quiet times, we can find peace and renewal.

B. Small group. We don’t have a formal small group ministry but don’t let that stop you. Just regularly meet with people you care about and people who care about you. Fulfill the Biblical mandate from Hebrews 10:25: “*Let us encourage one another daily.*” We can’t be encouraged daily by going to worship once a week. We need to get together with people who care about us, to share the joys and sorrows of our life; where we can pray for one another and come closer together and closer to God. And we do have small groups like our Sunday School classes, our choirs, our bell choirs, and praise band. In addition there is Angel Food, Off Time, and Bible Studies. And I am sure that there are others. They are small groups and we all need to be a part of at least one.

C. Worship. Specifically **singing.** Praise renews and rejuvenates. Psalm 59 “*I will sing of Your strength in the morning and I will sing of Your love for You are my refuge in times of trouble.*” Singing builds us up. When we begin worship by singing it is not just a warm up for worship. It is worship. Music touches us in places that words cannot, and we need that. Daily we go from one responsibility to another, all stressed out until we have nothing left to give. In those times it helps to put on a Christian tape or CD so we can sing along and in the process, restore our soul.

Ephesians 3:18 “*May you be able to feel and understand and experience God’s love for yourself.*” When we’re burned out physically, emotionally, spiritually, when we feel like we’ve got nothing left to give, our greatest need is to feel loved by God. And through these habits we can begin to feel that love of God flowing through our life again. We must always remember that the quality of our relationship with God determines the quality of every other relationship we have. When our relationship with God is messed up, everything else is going to be messed up as well. Besides, our human love wears out, but God’s love does not. We need to be connected to the Lord.

If you’re running on empty, know that you didn’t get that way overnight. And you’re not going to be renewed overnight. But if we build these habits into our lives, it will move us toward that renewal, toward the healing and wholeness that we all desperately need. And we begin it all by coming to Christ, for Jesus said, “*Come to Me when you’re tired and weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.*” (Matthew 11:28) Rest for your body and soul; for your spirit and emotions. We need that if we are going to have the kind of love that “*always protects,*

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always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” Our Lord offers us that love. He wants us to have and hold that love in our hearts, and to share that love in all our relationships. The lessons are here so it can happen. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.