

GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:34-35.

Life on earth is a very precious possession and it doesn't last very long. While we have it we should do the best we can with it. After we have been saved, our one big job in this world is to learn how to live.

One thing about life is that every person has to live it for himself. You cannot hand down to other people the wisdom of their predecessors. Parents live, they acquire some wisdom, they try to hand this wisdom down to their children -- and what happens? The children may take some of it, but much of it they reject; so they make the same old mistakes their parents made and they get hurt just as their parents did. And when they get to be parents their children have the same experience.

It seems that the wisdom of the human race runs out with every generation for each person has to acquire it for himself. The success or failure of your life depends upon how much of it you get.

Some people never learn how to live, no matter how old they get. They know little more about it when they finish than when they started. This is a sad fact.

The secret of how to live is in the identification of one's self with the one Person Who really knew how to live, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one of Whom Paul said, "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). One of the reasons for our attending church services is to study the principles and teachings of Christ, the greatest Person Who ever lived, in order that we may learn how to live more wisely and successfully.

In this all-important matter of living, which is neither simple nor easy, one of the fundamental problems is our relationship to other people. We must learn to get along with people, and that will require adjustments. From the human standpoint, observation has convinced me that the degree to which people succeed or fail depends primarily on how well they adjust to and get along with others. So many fail in their jobs or positions because they can't get along with their associates. People who rub everybody the wrong way cannot hope to avert failure. If one does not learn to adjust to and get along with other people, he will have difficulties all his life. Every person needs to learn the art of getting along with others. When difficulties arise, do something about them quickly. It is easy to magnify such differences. There is something in human nature that seems to delight in doing that. And the longer you wait the wider the gap will grow. Settle your differences, if you have them, weld yourselves together in love so that, always, the big thing in your human relationships will be the common purpose and feelings you have with others.

One of the greatest psychologists America ever produced was the late William James. Dr. James served as professor of anatomy, psychology and philosophy at Harvard University. That was quite a combination of subjects. You might say that he was a professor of body, mind, and soul. He was certainly one of the greatest thinkers we have ever had. He said: "One of the greatest drives of human nature is the desire to be appreciated." I would remind you that God built into human beings a deep desire or craving for the esteem and love of their fellows.

Nothing runs deeper in human nature than the desire to be appreciated. You see it in small children: the craving for approval, the attempt to secure attention and recognition, the courting of the limelight. You see it in teenagers: physically awkward and self-conscious, often emotionally insecure, eager to be acceptable and congenial in their circle, dreading the possibility of going friendless. Very often the young person asks:

"How can I get along with my schoolmates?" or "How can I get my friends to like me better?" or to put it even more bluntly, "How can I be popular?" Those who ask, "How can I be popular?" want an answer right now. One young man expressed it this way: "Why is it people don't like me? I seem to be able to get just so close to others and then a barrier goes up that I cannot penetrate. And I do want to be liked." You see this in people of every age: the desire to be a success socially, to be wanted, welcomed, esteemed, and not to be left out of things. There is a deep desire in every one for that relationship with our fellow men which we call being liked, or accepted, or loved. There is nothing so pathetic as being rejected, whether just in the imagination or in fact.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of learning to get along with people. Andrew Carnegie paid Charles Schwab a salary of a million dollars a year. Why was he willing to pay him more than three thousand dollars a working day? Was it because Mr. Schwab knew more about steel than any other man? No, under him were many men who knew more about steel and its production than Schwab did. He drew that salary because he knew one fundamental and most important thing — he knew how to get along with other people. If you know that one thing, there is hardly any limit to the possibilities of your success in any area of life. Failing to learn that, your life will be crippled and warped, if not a total failure. You cannot be happy and successful unless you learn how to get along with others.

The capacity to adjust harmoniously to other people, without the sacrifice of principle, will determine our success or failure in all important human relationships. Some of these adjustments are very difficult. They are especially difficult when the other person has ideas, interests and purposes quite different from ours. When in 1935 King George V of England celebrated his jubilee, one of his duties was to ride in the royal carriage through the streets of London. Great crowds gathered, there was much cheering, and Queen Mary — who, of course, rode with the King — thoroughly enjoyed the proceedings. But the King was averse to public display, and presently gave evidence of boredom. Thereupon the Queen, like any energetic and ambitious wife, tried to take the situation in hand. When there was an outburst of cheers she would dig her elbow into King George's ribs. She was trying to get him to bow and smile, show appreciation, and give evidence of life. Presently the royal carriage had to stop for a moment, and a London policeman heard words which were not intended for common ears. The King exclaimed, "Mary, if you poke me again, I'll get out and walk!" Adjusting to other people, even royalty faces a hard task.

Nearly every normal person wants to be liked, wants approval, acceptance and recognition. There is nothing wrong in itself with that. It is natural to prefer commendation to criticism, and popularity to ostracism. Christ said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

There is a place for a proper self-esteem, and this of necessity involves being in happy, harmonious relations with others. Liking oneself and being liked are inextricably bound up with each other. The irrational hostility that some people vent on one another is often projected self-hate. In the days before his conversion, Tolstoi wrote in his diary, "It is myself I am weary of and find intolerable and a torment. I want to fall asleep and forget myself and cannot." Feeling like that about himself, Tolstoi must have been a sore trial to his relatives and associates. To live with himself, a person has in some degree to like himself and to be liked by others.

It is pathetic when one wants to love and to be loved, but does not know how to do the one or to win the other. The danger is that in their attitude to life and people they may become cold and hard, an attitude that in turn only further isolates them from their fellows.

Some people will go to great lengths to be liked. They will fawn on those whose friendship or favor they covet, will shower praise or attention on them to ingratiate themselves. On the other hand, some because of the craving for appreciation, will accept fawning and flattery, detecting neither its absurdity nor the insincerity back of it. Wordsworth, praised effusively to his face by a disciple from Scotland, was heard remarking a few minutes later that the Scot was the most intelligent and well-informed Scot he had ever met.

Self-centeredness is a peril that threatens everybody. When mastered by it we become like a person standing alone in the middle of the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. Everywhere he looks, he will see himself. Nobody is completely immune to the insidious approach of self-centeredness.

I want to suggest a few simple rules for getting along with people.

1. Learn to get along with yourself.

More often than not, conflicts between ourselves and others spring from a conflict within ourselves. When you have an emotional conflict, then others whom you meet will probably be a bit upsetting to you. Haven't you heard somebody say, "That person burns me up"? That is a picturesque and exact description of the inward condition of the one making the statement. One cannot stand that sort of agitation indefinitely. Many people become ill simply because of inability to overcome prolonged agitation. A great physician recently stated that whereas twenty-five years ago only two per cent of stomach disorders, indigestion and affiliated maladies were traceable to mental states, now probably twenty-five per cent of such cases are due to nervous tension or agitation. People get sick largely because they cannot or will not control and discipline their minds.

2. Cultivate the art of overcoming criticism.

Don't get upset when people find fault with you and make derogatory statements about you. When you do something others haven't done or can't do, someone is sure to shoot an arrow of criticism at you. The higher one climbs in achievement and influence, the more you will be criticized. Expect it.

"You may get through the world
but your march will be slow
If you listen to all
that is said as you go;
You'll be worried and troubled
and kept in a stew,
For talkative folks
must have something to do,
And so they talk.

If you're quiet and modest
it will be presumed
That your humble position
is slyly assumed;
You're a wolf in sheep's clothing,
or just a plain fool,
But don't get excited,
keep perfectly cool,
And let people talk.

If you show resolution
and boldness of heart,
A slight indication
to take your own part,
Some people will say
you're conceited and vain,
But keep right on working
and never explain,
For folks will still talk."

--Samuel Hodge.

It is encouraging to Christians to remember that the sinless Saviour met verbal knifing everywhere He went. There was always a little group standing around to find fault with just about everything that He said or did. Is the servant greater than his Lord? If you and I are ever going to reach our maximum usefulness, we must build up an immunity to criticism. Never allow anybody to determine whether or not you have peace of mind and happiness. Meet criticism with good will.

3. Get interested in other people.

You can win more friends in a month by being interested in them than in ten years by trying to get them interested in you. Instead of boring people about the details of your operation or your children, ask them to tell you the details about theirs. Instead of talking about your vacation, find out what the other person did on his.

A person is sorely deprived who lacks a true friend. People may be friendly toward us and yet we may not possess one sincere, unchanging friend. Samuel Johnson had this in mind when he remarked to Boswell of a certain person, "He has friends but no friend." A true friend is one with whom you can share yourself completely. A friend is one with whom you can be your real self without pretense or deception or camouflage. Robert Louis Stevenson remarked that the stature of our friend is most revealed when we have failed miserably in some enterprise. He will "stand between us and our own contempt, believing in our best." Speaking of the friendship of David and Jonathan, the Bible says, "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." In the New Testament, one of the most notable friendships is that of Paul the Apostle and Luke the Greek physician. They were dearer to each other because of their mutual love for and loyalty to Christ.

How are you off for friends? What is the condition of your friendships? Are you like the man who said bitterly, "I haven't got a friend in the world. There's not one of my acquaintances whom I can really trust enough to be my friend and confidant." That confession revealed far more about the man himself than it did about his potential friends. Self-centered people always lack friends. No one should think only of his own affairs. Paul said, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than them -- every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Christ showed unfailing interest in people. He always treated them with chivalry and courtesy. He was a great encourager. It was His habit to see first in man, woman, and child what was likeable and commendable, and not what was blameworthy. He saw in shifty, unstable, unreliable Simon a man capable of becoming solid and dependable. It was because Christ enabled men to see what was best in themselves that He did them so much good. Unprincipled men and flippant women felt constrained to say about Christ: "This man likes us, sees something redeemable in us, does not treat us as the flotsam and jetsam of humanity." He brought out the best in people.