

Task #12 - How to Get Along With People  
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

Please turn to John, Chapter 13, Verse 34. Then if you would like to adjust your seats and get more comfortable, let me encourage you to do that.

This week I had what one might call a technological bad hair day. I woke up on Wednesday morning, and I got up an hour and a half earlier than I usually do because I needed to get some work done. Sure enough, my entire web service, internet, e-mail, the whole thing is gone. So, I'm on the phone pretty early and decided to wait awhile. I didn't call in until 5:00, and I got some sleepy-eyed person on the telephone one of the support techs, and we talked through the problem. Over the next hour and a half, I talked to four different people none of whom knew how to help me fix this problem. I have a very good service, but we determined that probably what had happened is that something had gotten fried. So they scheduled an inside tech to come out on site, and that person arrived. I guess it must have been on Tuesday morning because the tech got there on Wednesday morning. I was expecting a tech, and you can imagine my surprise when I opened the door and there is Elton John. Unbelievable. Tie-dyed T-shirt and everything and about the same height as Elton, but when I looked more closely, I said, "That can't be Elton because I don't think Elton has an ear ring in his nose." I invited this man to come in and he did some things on the inside to replace my modem, and my mother and father brought me up to respect and care for all people. So I had genuine feelings of affection towards this fellow. I had an opportunity to talk with him a little about his life, very little about his life, and then I gave him a copy of "The Man in the Mirror." Signed it for him and everything. He leaves, I go underneath my desk, trying to figure out why the other computers in the house won't work to find out that he has unhooked every wire for this very complicated multi-port system, even unplugged the power source, and I had no idea how to fix it. Okay, so that's one story.

He determines that while he has the inside working doesn't have the outside working, so he schedules an outside tech. He was there on Wednesday and on Thursday, I hear a knock on my door and go down stairs and open the door and there's Dreadlocks???? I mean lots of dreadlocks, and one of the nicest young men I've run across in a long time. We actually got into a very deep and meaningful spiritual conversation. In fact, I asked him how he's doing and he said, "I'm doing pretty good except for one life-long problem." And I said, "Well, what's that?" He said, "Well, life itself." I said, "Well, tell me about that." He said, "You know when I was young man I would do all kinds of things," he's thirty years old now. "When I was a young man I would do all kinds of things and I stopped going to men's stores." I said, "Are you a reader?" He said, "Yeh, I am doing a little reading. In fact I have three books going right now. One's about the religion of Bob Marley, the second book I am reading is the Bible." Of course, my ears perked up at that. I told him, "You know, I happen to make my way by writing books for men, and if you would be interested, I'd be happy to give you a copy of my book." We ended up having a very tremendous conversation. Yes, it was a technological bad hair day, but there were some side benefits to it as well.

Now, it would have been so easy for me, if I had been brought up and trained differently, to look at these two people who are different than me and to reject them without ever giving them a chance. I am a conservative, orthodox, evangelical, save, sanctified, spirit-filled, Bible-believing Born Again Christian. I also happen to love gays, blacks, people of other ethnicities, Jews, Muslims, Atheists and Agnostics. Now, I don't love all those people who are different than me in spite of the fact that I am a Christian. I love them because I am a Christian. In other words, to say you are Orthodox, to say you're Conservative, doesn't mean you separate yourself from other people; it means that you embrace them.

The reason I really do this is not because I am a Christian, but when I was growing up if I would have ever offered an ethnic, racial or religious slur, my father would have slapped me so far across the room, I would have needed a road map to get back. So, I thank my father for drilling into me the acceptance of all kinds of people. My father taught me how to get along with people. Question. How do you get along with people? How do you get along with people who are racially, ethnically, politically, religiously different than you are? And, what are you teaching your children about how to get along with people?

What I want to talk to you about today is teaching our children how to get along with other people. Take a look with me at John, Chapter 13. So what makes it difficult for some people to get along with others? John, Chapter 13, Verse 34, Jesus says, "A new command I give you." What is it? "Love one another." Then he says, "As I have loved you." As I have agaped you, "So you also must love another." So you must also agape one another.

Listen to a passage out of Romans 15 and the message that is a paraphrase of the New Testament by Peterson; Romans 15. Listen to this, "May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all." Why do people find it difficult to get along with other people? People find it difficult to get along with other people when they find it difficult to get along with Jesus Christ. In fact, here's the big idea for today. Until you can get along with Jesus Christ, you will never be able to get along with anyone else either.

Something worth teaching our children is, "Children, until you can get along with Jesus Christ, you will never really get along with anyone else either." Do you think it is possible for someone who has not experienced agape love to agape love another? Do you think it is possible to love in a way you've never been loved? You might be able to have for a season the outward symbols of that kind of love, but it you've not experienced the inward reality of agape love, there's no way that you can pass that along to another person on a consistent and on an inspired basis.

I want to give you two steps this morning. Two steps to help your children get along with other people.

Step one is to teach our children how to get along with Jesus Christ. What is the highest purpose, the greatest calling, the most important thing that a Christian can do if we want to teach our children these things? What is the most important thing that a Christian can do? What is the most important thing a Christian should do? If you were looking through the Bible and wanting to come up with the single big idea, I'm hearing all across the room, that you would love God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, all of your strength, with a totality of your being, with the sum of your strength, with every ounce of your energy. This is the first and greatest commandment. Right?

The second greatest commandment is what? It is that you would love your neighbor as yourself. Then Matthew 22 tells us that on these two laws, what depends on these two laws? Everything else. All the law, everything in Moses, all the Prophets, in fact I think one of the versions says, "If you keep these two laws, you will find that you are keeping all the others." Living Bible.

The most important thing to do is to teach our children how to get along with Jesus Christ. "As I have loved you, so you must also love one another." How do people love other people if they don't have the love of Jesus Christ?

I'll tell you briefly about a man, a man who in the middle years of his life is unemployed. He's had difficulty keeping meaningful employment; part of the reason is that he is just a very difficult man to be around. He does not know how to get along with other people, and he takes this out on his family. He screams, he hollers, he's angry. He's a bitter man. Do you think this man gets up in the morning and wants to be bitter, wants to be angry, wants to be difficult? I don't think so. When you get to know this man, guess what you find out? He's a carbon copy of his own daddy. He's exactly like his own daddy. You know what I'm saying to you, men? I don't need to say it, do I? You know what I'm saying.

There is a wonderful book that some of you might want to read. It's called, "Emotional Intelligence." How many of you have ever heard of this book? A number of you have heard of this book. It's actually written in a fairly populace language so you can read it. It would be worth buying the book to read one fairly short chapter called the "Family Crucible." Chapter 12. I want to read you a couple of excerpts from this: Goleman, the author, writes, "There are hundreds of studies showing that how parents treat their children whether with harsh discipline or empathetic understanding, with indifference or warmth..." and so on, "has deep and lasting consequences for the child's emotional life." No surprise there.

He says, "Here are the three parenting styles that don't work: ignoring feelings all together, ignoring the feeling of your kids; being too laissez-faire, you'll have to read the book I don't have time; then being contemptuous, showing no respect for how the child feels." Then he says this, "Finally, there are parents who seize the opportunity if a child's upset to act as to what amounts to an emotional coach or mentor. They take the child's feelings seriously enough to try to understand exactly what is upsetting them." For example: Are you angry because Tommy hurt your feelings? There is just a lot more here.

The risks are greatest for those children whose parents are grossly inept, they themselves being immature, abusing drugs, depressed, chronically angry or, simply, aimless and living chaotic lives. Such parents are far less likely to give adequate care, let alone attune to their toddler's emotional needs. Follow this, long quote: "Simple neglect," studies find, "can be more damaging than outright abuse." And so on. How to raise a bully, the extinction of empathy through abuse ---- ???

The problem is not so much what's happening with Dad in this series, although that's a big enough problem of its own, right? The problem for this series is that the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. And as we sow into the lives of our children, so they reap throughout all of their adult lives. Some of us need to break with the past. We need to smash the old order of doing things the way we do things so that our children may grow up and be able to get along with other people. Maybe we haven't done such a good job ourselves. Maybe it's because of our own daddy. That doesn't mean that as people of Christ we have a different King, we different father, and it doesn't mean we can't break with the past. It sets our family lineage on an entire new course for generations to come. We can do this, men; we can do this. We can teach our children how to get along with people.

The application is two-fold on this part. Make sure that you do everything humanly possible to lead your children to love, to trust, abide in Christ, obedience to Christ, that personal relationship with Jesus. Secondly, hold up the authority of God's word to your children; Biblical authority. If your children grow up assenting to the authority of the Bible, they are much more likely to live by the word when they get older in years to come.

The reason I'm telling you this is because until you can get along with Jesus Christ, you'll never really be able to get along with anyone else either. If we want our children to get along in the world with other people, they really need to be able to get along with Jesus Christ. You have known people who look like they're not Christian, but they have it all together; they're making it work; they're getting along and they're getting all their deals done. But you need to know these people are not making it. Go to any little pod of condominiums and any little retirement village down in south Florida where they drive around in golf cars, and guess what you will find? A lot of lonely people. A lot of lonely people whose children don't really want to have anything to do with them because they couldn't get along with their kids. They really don't have any friends. They have a golf foursome, but they hate all the other three people and those other people hate them. The only reason they play golf together is because they have to have a foursome in order to get a tee time. They don't like other people; other people don't like them. You can find them by the thousands. Am I right? Do we want to be like that? (Response NO loudly and lots of laughter) Highly motivated men!

Second step: The first step is to teach them how to get along with Jesus Christ. The second step is to teach them how to get along with other people. What are the reasons that children and, for that matter, adults have trouble getting along with other people? What are some of the reasons? Rejection? Anger? Selfishness? Pride? Unforgiveness? What else? Having ego and pride, as well. Laziness? No self-esteem? What else? Judgmentalism? All of these are true, right? And we could probably come up with another 100 if we had time, right? There are lots of reasons that people having difficulty getting along with other people. Nobody said it, but we would have come to it soon, right? They haven't had a good example. Maybe you haven't had a good example, but if you can start to get along with Jesus Christ, you can get along with other people, like your children, and you can pass this as a heritage on to them.

Last week we talked about the different types of intelligence that Howard Gardner pioneered in his book, "Frames of Mind" in 1983. This happens to be the book. While the Bobby Goldman ??? book, "Emotional Intelligence" is a little more on the practical side, this book tends to be a little more on the theoretical side. Some of you who are interested in that range of material might enjoy this chapter, Chapter 10, "The Personal Intelligences." I am not going to go into it, but he starts this chapter with a fascinating story about how in 1909 Sigmund Freud came to the United States, the only time he was ever on American soil, and he spoke up in Worcester. Leland ??? James at that point was an older man and the Austrian was a young man. --- James was a great and noted philosopher in our country and James went down to hear him at this meeting. James basically noted that Freud was bringing a whole new paradigm. I will read. "Freud, the pessimistic European intellectual, had chosen to focus on the development of the individual psyche, it's battles within the individual's immediate family, the struggle for independence..." and so on. "James on the other hand had a more positive form of psychology ... more than his Austrian counterpart. The American thinker stressed the importance of relationships with other individuals as a means of gaining ends of effecting progress and knowing one's self."

You see these two types of societies in the world. You see societies like ours that are very focused on the individual, and, for us, often having relationships with other people is really only a means to gain our goals. In other words, we are often brought up to use other people. There are other cultures ironically, you know when you pray the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father?" Well, why is it not my father? "Give us this day." Why is it not give me this day? "Forgive us our sins." Why is it not forgive me my sins? Why is that? A lot of cultures of the world are built that the relationship, the community is the most important thing, and the individual finds his identity as part of the community. So we're so very autonomous here and that's fine. But you can see how this can have a tremendous possibility of sending a signal to our young people that it's all about them. All that to say that, that our kids end up often growing up thinking it's all about them. Guess what? In Christianity, it's not all about the individual. It is all about Jesus Christ. It is all about loving God with all of our hearts, mind and strength, and it's about loving one another as ourselves. "As I have loved you," Jesus said, "so you must also love one another."

What practical steps can you and I take to help our children get along better with these different types of people? We could talk on this for a week, right? Let me give you a few really good ideas. Turn with me to Romans, Chapter 12, not 11 as I mentioned earlier, and I want to give you a passage of scripture that I would like to encourage you, men, to sit down with your children and go over this passage of scripture with them as a credo of how to get along with other people. This passage covers so much of the waterfront of what it means to get along with people.

Let's start at Verse 10, and we'll read through Verse 18. I'm going to read very quickly. I'm not going to exegete this passage for you. You take it home; you exegete it with your kids, okay?

Verse 10: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Let me read that to you out of the "Message," just the last Verses 16 - 18. Just listen to this; Verses 16 -18. "Get along with each other. Don't be stuck up. Make friends with nobody's. Don't be the great somebody. Don't hit back. Discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody." We need to teach this to our children in a very radical departure from the basic ethos of the culture of the world. If they don't hear it from you, guess what? They're not going to hear this message. That's one very practical application.

Second: Treat your kids with respect. I am incensed sometimes when I see the way, familiarity breeds contempt, you've heard this, of course, and the contempt that some parents treat their children with. There is no possibility that this child will ever respond to an adult like that. It will never happen. You must, men, treat our children with respect. We need to have a real relationship because we are modeling to them how

they are going to treat other people, not to mention the fact that we end up with a broken relationship ourselves because they can't wait to get away from us.

Siblings fighting with each other. Practical application. We also need to understand that the one yelling and screaming is not always the one at fault. For about six months, something like that, when my daughter was a senior and my son was a ninth grader, getting ready in the morning they're squabbling, they're yelling and we're trying to make peace and get this stuff settled down. It was out of control. My daughter's the screamer, my son doesn't scream at anybody. He just gets you, you know? He practices what we call passive aggressive behavior. You've heard of this, right? So it's aggressive behavior, but he knows that she needs to get into the bathroom to get ready for school. So what does he do? He drags his feet and is in there for an extra five minutes until she's about to go crazy because she's very punctual, and he knows this. So she starts screaming and hollering and he's in there smiling, right?. Now, understand the dynamics. You have to put a stop to this. You just can't let this go on. What I did was to sit them down and say, "Look, it's not going to be long and both of you are going to be away from here; off to college and making a life for yourselves. Then it won't be long after that, it may not seem like it now, but your Mom and I aren't going to be here either, and the only two people you are going to have by blood will be each other. If you don't figure out how to start getting along now, you need to be terrified that you might create a breach in your relationship that would be so wide that you would not be able to bring it back again together later." In that case, that pretty much took care of it. Those are three applications, that's enough, right?

One day this week Patsy and I went out to dinner, and we had the sharpest, nicest, young 25-year old guy waiter. One of the things in working with men that I've picked up over the years is that I can kind of tell when something is not right. He was so happy, so on top of everything, so service-minded that I could see there was inner turmoil there. In fact, to me, maybe not to others, but to me, he looked like a deer caught in headlights. I asked him, I'll call him Sam, I said, "Sam, are you a reader?" He said, "Not really, you know I have some kind of ADD or something going on." I said, "Well, I write books for men, and I have a book that I would like to present to you if you might be interested in that." He said, "Well, what's this book about?" I said, "Basically, it's about how a young man like you can take look at the different areas of his life and put his life in order." I'm telling you, I have never seen such a change in countenance of a man. All this façade, all of this veneer of go-getter, happy disappeared. He said, "You know, I can't believe that I'm meeting you like this today. I am in so much trouble right now. I am 25 years old, and I have no clue where I am going. I just didn't get much support from my parents when I was growing up, and I'm kind of floundering. The truth of this is that I am lost. I am lost." If we don't teach our children how to get along with Jesus Christ, they'll never be able to get along with anyone else either.

Let us pray:

Father, as we bring this series on Fathering to a close, there are many things that have occurred to each of us that we would like to do better or there are regrets that have come across our hearts for which we need both forgiveness and skill. Lord, I pray that you would give each of us a sense of forgiveness where we are repentant and sorry and skill in the areas where we need to do better. Lord, we are human beings. We are not machines; we make mistakes. We pray that we would forgive our fathers in the same way we would have our own children forgive us. Just take a moment now and think about one or two things that you would like to do differently as a result of this series. Then just ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to follow through. Lord, these are our prayers. We ask you to do these things for us in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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