

Behaviors of Faith

Respect Others

Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. - Romans 13:7

The words respect and honor are often interlinked in the Bible. In fact, the word respect is not found in the Old Testament, though the word honor is used in both the Old and New Testaments, most notably in Deuteronomy, in the Ten Commandments. We are told to respect or honor everyone, as is their due. Honor thy mother and father, for example. But doesn't respect or honor have to be earned? Then there is the Golden Rule, a rule common to all of the world's great religions. As Jesus preached, "All things therefore that you want people to do to you, do thus to them." At its core, the Golden Rule is all about respect - respecting people whose opinions differ from our own, respecting people who look differently than we do, dress, or speak differently than we do. It extends further, looking past what people do, but rather at who they are, or who they are in the process of becoming. The Golden Rule is based on one basic principle: that all human beings have dignity and that the feelings of others should always be taken into account.

Applying it to my life...

1. Think of an occasion when you showed respect to someone different from yourself: for example, someone whose views were radically different from your own? Was it difficult to extend respect to this person? Did you feel good about extending respect to that person?
2. Does respect have to be earned? Should we respect someone whose actions go against everything we believe in, such as someone who commits a crime, or purposefully hurts another person?
3. Listening attentively and not being judgmental are two ways we can show respect. What are some other ways?
4. Is respecting someone the same as liking someone? How do the two differ?

Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. - 1 Peter 2:17

Think Positively

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes. - Psalm 19:8

While the word positive is not used in either the Old or New Testaments, we are commanded throughout the Bible to live a joyful life and to find joy in the Lord. In the Old Testament, we are commanded to focus on the precepts of the Lord; while in the New Testament, Paul tells us to find joy in all things. Yet, every day, we find ourselves subject to life's little aggravations: a driver cuts you off in traffic, your boss tells you that he or she is disappointed in your work, or you have a disagreement with a spouse or friend. How can you possibly stay positive with all of life's little negativities nipping at your heels? Maintaining a positive attitude can steer you through this maze of aggravations, and help you rediscover all the joy that life has to offer.

Applying it to my life...

1. How can we stay positive and joyous, when there is so much negativity and conflict in the world?
2. Why does it seem easier to be negative than positive?
3. Where does joy come from? How can we tap into the eternal spring of joy available to us?
4. Think of a time when you allowed lots of little negative things to affect your outlook on life. How could you have handled those situations differently?
5. Think of some things that bring you joy in your daily life.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. - Isaiah 49:13

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. - John 15:11

Pay Attention

Listen, and hear my voice; Pay attention, and hear my speech. - Isaiah 28:23

It today's high-tech, multi-tasking society, it has become all too easy to lose sight of the importance of paying attention to what is going on around you. Our attention is divided, from the moment we wake up in the morning, until we go to bed at night. Instead of doing one thing really well, we are challenged to get three things done. And what gets lost in the process? A lifetime of special moments that simply get lost in the harried, hurried reality of our daily existence. It becomes sadly true that we wait for the bad things in life to open our eyes to the good things we weren't paying attention to before.

Paying attention is all about focus; about seeing what is happening around you; about not just hearing, but listening to what is being said. Yes, it takes a little more time. But the rewards can be found in a few quiet moments of appreciating an especially beautiful sunset; of laughing as your pets frolic in the back yard; of really listening to a friend as he or she shares something of special significance. Indeed, we are commended to pay attention 26 times in the New and Old Testaments. There are 21 additional instances where we are warned of the dangers of not paying attention. The message is clear: If we all paid just a little more attention to the world around us, what a better world it could be.

Applying it to my life...

1. Think of a time when you were hearing a friend, but not really listening. How might you have handled the situation differently? Did your inattention hurt your friend's feelings? Was he or she able to tell you weren't really listening?
2. Is multi-tasking a part of your daily routine? Think of two or three examples of times in your daily routine when you are called upon to do multiple tasks at once. Does this diminish your ability to pay attention to each task?
3. When was the last time you really looked at the smallest details of the world around you – a sunset, the clouds rolling in before a storm, a beautiful flower by the side of the road?
4. How can you encourage others to slow down and pay more attention of the world around them?

"But now, hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. See, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks. My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely. - Job 33:1-3

Make a Difference

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. - 2 Corinthians 9:6

The verse from Corinthians implies that you will make a difference when you give from a thankful heart. When you give - or make a difference - from a willing heart and with the right attitude, God is pleased, and you, yourself, are blessed. Of course, the most powerful example in the Bible of making a difference is the life of Jesus. He withheld nothing from others, including His own life, and in so doing showed us the path to follow in our own lives.

"It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference." So said news broadcaster Tom Brokaw. So, how can we make a difference in our daily lives? Most of us do it in small, quiet ways. A greeting to a stranger, a hug or a kind word, listening to someone who needs to be heard ... all of these seemingly small things can make a tremendous difference in someone else's life. Help out at your favorite charity, not for the publicity or notoriety, but simply for the sake of making some small difference. And as you help others, you will be making a difference in your own life, too.

Applying it to my life...

1. Think of something you have done that made a difference in someone else's life.
2. Can something as small as a smile make a difference? What are some other seemingly small acts that can change someone's day?
3. With the current focus on green technology and living, what are some ways we can make a difference to our planet and environment?
4. Many people equate giving money as making a difference. What are some other ways that you can change the course of someone's life?

Speak Kindly

The wise of heart is called perceptive, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness. Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it, but folly is the punishment of fools. The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious, and adds persuasiveness to their lips. Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. - Proverbs 16:21-24

There are so many references in the Bible about the importance of speaking kindly. In Ephesians, 4:29, it is written, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful in building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." It sounds so simple - to speak kindly. Yet every day, we are confronted with situations where we lose our temper, or do not pay attention to how our words might be perceived. Just like our actions, words have the power to build up or break down, to hurt or to heal. Yet how many times during the day do we speak without thinking? How many times do we react to someone's angry words with invectives of our own? Next time, before you speak, remember the power of your words - and choose them with care.

Applying it to my life...

1. Think of a time when you allowed someone else's anger to dictate your own angry response. How might you have handled the situation differently?
2. Remember a time when someone's kind words made a difference in your life.
3. In this political season, how could the concept of speaking kindly impact our government or political system?
4. Discuss the power of words. Give examples of words that elicit a powerful response.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. - Proverbs 25:11

Say thank you

O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good; for God's steadfast love endures forever. - Psalm 107:1

As Melody Beattie, best-selling author and journalist wrote, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow."

And when you are grateful, the two most important words in your language are "thank you."

"You simply will not be the same person two months from now after consciously giving thanks each day for the abundance that exists in your life," wrote Sarah Ban Breathnach.

Indeed. There is a reason that saying thank you is one of the first lessons we learn as a child. The trick is in remembering that those words never lose their importance in our lives. Say "thank you" every day, and watch as the spirit of gratitude opens your heart to all of life's possibilities.

Applying it to my life...

1. Name some things for which you are grateful.
2. Do you say "thank you" at every opportunity - when someone provides you with good service, when a car lets you merge into traffic, when a spouse does something unexpectedly thoughtful?
3. How can we be grateful in times of distress, when we are facing a personal crisis?

Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. 12 Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. 13 And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. - 1 Chronicles 29:11-13

Accept Others

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. - Psalm 19:14

Even on our best days, when everything is going just right, it often doesn't take much to alienate us from others. We can find ourselves reaching for unkind words and being hurtful to those whom we feel have insulted or mistreated us – or who may simply dislike us. Joel Osteen in his study guide, "Your Best Life Now," poses an interesting question and thought, "Are you good to people?" This question is easy as long as you picture your friends and allies as the recipients of your kindness and generosity. But things get uncomfortable when we are actually called to love our enemies."

At times like these, we need to focus our attention away from ourselves, away from our situation and place our focus upon God. As God's children, we can find power to overcome the temptations we face as we learn from God's Word how to face these challenges and how to seek ways to accept others. As we accept others, we also find greater acceptance; within our own lives, with our interactions with those where we work and play, and we make our community a better place for all.

1. Think of a time when you felt persecuted and hurt by the words or actions of someone. How did you feel? What did you do? Is there anything you would have liked to have done in a different way? How do you think God would have responded in the same situation?
2. How can we seek to be more accepting of those who do things contrary to what we like? God's Word instructs us to, *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. - Romans 12:14.* How can we seek to respond more positively to those who are hurtful to us?
3. *Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. - Romans 12:17.* Discuss how this passage can help us to be more accepting of others.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. - Romans 12:21

Rediscover Silence

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; 7a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; – Ecclesiastes 3:1-7

According to Rachel Naomi Remen, a pioneer of the holistic health movement, "The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention ... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words."

Sometimes, we try to fill every second of our life with noise. We always have to be doing something, talking to someone, going somewhere. We are surrounded with cell phones, pagers, e-mail. But when was the last time you just stopped everything? When was the last time you disconnected with everything going on around you long enough to reconnect with yourself? Perhaps it is time to rediscover the power of silence.

1. Do you find some time each day to be truly silent - to listen to your inner voice?
2. What are some ways to put aside the "noise" in your life - distractions, other people, your job, your spouse, your children, so that you can rediscover the power of silence?
3. Aside from your place of worship, where are some other places you can go to be silent?
4. Is being silent the same thing as turning off all of your thoughts, or is it being alone with your thoughts?

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from God comes my salvation. - Psalm 62:1

Listen

The LORD your God you shall follow, God alone you shall fear, God's commandments you shall keep, God's voice you shall obey, God you shall serve, and to God you shall hold fast. - Deuteronomy 13:4

We hear a lot of things. But how often do we really listen? In Luke 2:46, the story is told of Jesus, at age 12, being lost when he went with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. His parents had started home and discovered Jesus wasn't with them. As it is told in the scripture, "Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions."

Listening - not just hearing - but really listening to someone, demands focused attention. Sometimes, it requires looking beyond the words, to hear what is in someone's heart. As the saying goes, "We were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking." All too often we allow preoccupations and distractions to get in the way of listening to what is being said.

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening?
2. What are some ways you can become a better listener?
3. How can you overcome preoccupations and distractions, in order to stay focused on what someone is saying? How can you avoid judging what is being said?
4. What are some forms of non-verbal communication that we need to be aware of in our daily lives?

God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations. - Exodus 3:15

Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness. - Exodus 5:1

Keeping Your Cool

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:6-7

Though the expression "keeping your cool" was not around in Biblical times, throughout the Bible we are reminded of the importance of staying calm, about putting our trust and our faith in God even in the most trying of times.

In these pressure-packed days, it is all too easy to lose your cool. Indeed, many things can cause us become angry, from life-challenging situations to minor frustrations. When was the last time you slammed down the phone when faced with yet another computerized voice? When was the last time you uttered some not-so-heavenly thoughts about a bad driver who nearly caused an accident? When was the last time you got into a shouting match with your partner or spouse? Although anger is a natural emotion, the trick is to control your anger, rather than allowing anger to control you. While frustrations and challenges will always be a part of life, remember we have a choice about how we respond to those situations.

1. Describe a recent situation in which you lost your cool. How could you have handled the situation differently?
2. What are some anger-management techniques that can help you deal with life's frustrations and challenges?
3. How does your faith help you "keep your cool?"
4. What are some techniques you can use to help diffuse the anger of others - helping them to regain their cool?

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. - Psalm 46:1-3