

Relationships and getting along #1, The Great Pink Underpants Incident of 2014

Hi all,

I think I've found a way to get out of housework - just mess up enough that Barb finally says, "Okay, okay, please, you always do it wrong, just let me do it from now on."

Of course I don't try to get out of housework, nor do I try to mess up, it just comes naturally.

As Barb has accurately observed, I use the washing machine like a trash can for clothes - I toss the dirty clothes in there until full over the course of a few days, hers and mine, and when full I just pour in detergent, shut the lid and do a load of laundry without a clue what clothes are in the machine. That explains why her red shirt was tossed in with my white underpants, a white t-shirt of mine, and some of her lightly colored things as well, turning everything a uniform color of pink.

For a few days until we could buy new underwear I just hoped the Father ordered my steps enough that my mother's voice in my head telling me 'Always wear clean underwear in case you're in an accident' would be proven false, as beneath my jeans I was wearing hot pink underwear that I would not want any emergency room attendant to see. I had imaginations of being carried in on a stretcher calling out in desperation; 'I don't normally wear pink underwear, really I don't!' before passing out. That wasn't my first laundry offense, for by the time of the Great Pink Underpants Incident of 2014 we'd already been married 36 years or so. This was just the latest of offenses and the one that required new laundry rules.

I seem to always think and often say to Barb (usually under my breath) the 'Man's Prayer' from Canada's *The Red Green Show*: "I'm a man. I can change. If I have to. I guess." And if I am really in trouble I fall back on the *Red Green* motto in pretend Latin: "*Quando omni flunkus moritati*" (When all else fails, play dead)

So now that I am forbidden from washing any clothes of Barb's it makes my life easier. I still see the washing machine as the dirty clothes hamper - but now I just throw mine or Chris' in and ignore her pile of dirty clothes. Sometimes I look over at her pile and think; 'I can do her clothes without harming anything', and then I recognize that has to be from Satan and quickly rebuke any thought of doing her laundry.

No one told me this when I was a kid!

Nobody sat me down and said in premarital counseling in 1978; "Son, when you get married you are committing yourself to a lifetime of personal growth, change, development as a person and in Christ. Don't think for a second you will change her and let not her think for a split second she will change you. You and Christ in both of you will change each other if you are both flexible, teachable, humble, transparent and honest, and willing to be stretched more ways than you can imagine. And part of that means there will come a day when you will have ruined enough clothes in the washing machine she will tell you that you are banned from washing her clothes. Go with it son, lay down your life for your wife and stay away from her laundry pile."

If Barb's pastor, Reverend Staton who married us, had said that to me I would have smiled broadly like a 10 year old child trying to be polite to a rocket scientist using technical terms to explain the velocity of a rocket leaving earth's atmosphere in relation to the pounds of thrust and the pull of gravity considering the weight of the rocket and altitude of orbit desired. Picture a big toothy grin and wide eyes in which there would be nothing behind them to signify intelligent life. That would have been me back then.

I did it my way

When I gave my heart to the Lord when I was 16, no one told me I was signing up for a lifetime of constant change and personal growth. I thought of it as a sort of adventure, a great eternal explore, a brave new world in the kingdom of God, and first and foremost was that I had a Father again.

But when Barb and I started dating and I led her to the Lord (she was 15, I was 16 years old) I experienced my first real challenge to change. It seems so simple now, but a few months into dating Barb said "You always ask me what I want to do and where I want to go, but no matter what I say we end up doing what you want to do and going where you want to go." I had to really and truly look down inside and examine myself and my history of decision making with her. I had to be brutally honest and

humble and admit she was right. Where is THAT chapter and verse? Where was THAT in any of our prayer and praise meetings of 1974 and 1975?

I learned for the first time that Barb is not one to make such an accusation unless she had the ammunition to back up her claim - with decision after decision recited to me, which meant for us at that tender young age date after date and meal after meal. No decisions more serious than that, but it helped each of us grow in Christ and together.

Decisions were like "I want to see X movie what do you want to see Barb?" She would respond "I would like to see Y movie" but then we would go see X movie which I could justify by ticket price, or the time the movie started, or we'd be out early enough to grab a bite to eat with our friends, or some well founded reason like that which I thought I was right for the overall, big picture view of the night. Up to that point I thought she saw what I saw of the big picture and how the night would flow perfectly. All she wanted was to see Y movie. The result was I thought I was making the decision for our greater good, but in reality she never got what she wanted. Ouch.

Fortunately I was growing in the Lord in other areas, so I had developed an attitude that every challenge in my life, even the challenge of a girlfriend I thought I was in love with, presented an opportunity to become more Christ-like. My earth-dad was out of the picture of my life in these matters so it was the heavenly Father who helped me work through the question if I was in love with her or not.

When He asked me "Would you give up your life for her?" it caused deep introspection, even at that young age of 16 I realized one does not offer a light weight answer to a heavy weight question the Father God asks. After a few days of searching my heart, I told the Father "I can answer your question now. Yes. I would." I thought that would be that - I knew I was in love, yippee, yippee. But when He answered "Laying down your life for her may or may not mean in front of a firing squad, but it always means laying down your life in little ways for her every day. Your ideas, your plans, your thoughts, your priorities, serving and loving her as Christ does the church." It rocked my teenage world with the sudden realization of what saying "I love you" to her meant. I was signing up for a life time of change, and it scared me.

And that is why NOT doing her laundry for her is laying down my life for her - no more pink clothes

When she made doing her laundry off-limits part of me wanted to react like that 16 year old kid who could explain the big picture that I saw and how having me help with her clothes (I could learn my lesson, really I could) would be the best big-picture decision I could make for us all. But the older and wiser me realized my big picture view meant nothing if her white and flowery unmentionables turned out pink when I did laundry.

Friend, neighbor, co-worker, or spouse, loving your neighbor as yourself first and foremost means personal growth for us. As I so often say, anyone can say they are born again, but their righteousness remains unproven and unseen. God has therefore designed His righteousness in us to be proven within the frame work of relationships. And that starts at home. Another 'incident' from the life and times of John & Barb next week. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

www.cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com

Relationships and getting along #2, The cupcake incident of 1975.

Hi all,

When Barb and I were dating (we were 15 & 16) she soon became a regular at our house. Though we lived 4 miles apart (6.4 km) and in a different school district she thought nothing of riding her bicycle or driving to my house after school where we (mom, me, 2 brothers and 1 sister) lived in a country neighborhood.

This particular day our class at high school was holding a bake sale the next day to raise funds for something, and I was making cupcakes to help the effort. As Barb remembers it my mom was back in her office working on the books for her work, my brothers and sister were off doing other things, and I was alone in the kitchen.

I had gotten a box mix and had the batter ready to pour into the paper cups for the cupcakes. That was when Barb walked in - as I said by that time she was already practically part of our family so she just walked in freely and came into the kitchen. What she saw when she entered the kitchen stopped her in her tracks.

I had gotten out a cookie sheet and lined up all the paper cups in neat rows on the cookie sheet, and was just about to pour the batter into the first cup - and Barb says, "John. What you are doing?" I said "My class is having a bake sale tomorrow so I'm making cupcakes." She said something like "Really? What do you think is going to happen when you pour that batter into those cups?"

I really thought that was a stupid question as it was obvious I was baking cupcakes! Rather than stopping me (this should have been a clue to future interactions between us) she said, "Why don't you go ahead and pour one." I was suspicious of her grin and obvious enjoyment of what I thought was nothing more than watching her big strong boyfriend bake. Ohhhh how wrong I was. I was so ignorant and innocent I didn't know I was being set up.

You know what happened next - I hope you do at least - as I poured the batter into the first cup on the cookie sheet the paper flattened out and the batter enveloped the now flattened paper cup and went all over the cookie sheet, the counter and dripped onto the floor like lava flowing out of a volcano. I couldn't figure out for the life of me how women got those paper cups to stand up to the pressure of the batter. Maybe the batter solidified quickly at the first sign of the heat of the oven I thought to myself.

I don't recall seeing cupcake support things around the kitchen that would obviously be needed to make the paper stand up to the batter- maybe mom used some sort of semi-circular form to wrap around the cups. Maybe I could get some aluminum foil to wrap tightly around the paper - all these thoughts went through my naive brain in a matter of seconds. What was I doing wrong?

Barb stayed back watching the learning process. Oh wise 16 year old that she was, she was having fun with me like a cat bats a mouse around before going in for the kill. Finally she stepped in after I had carefully folded each fold in the next paper cup thinking helping the little creases in the paper might strengthen it, but as I started to pour cupcake #2 she mercifully stopped me and put me out of my misery. When I asked "What am I doing wrong?" then and only then did she say "You're supposed to put the paper cups into a cupcake tin." Of course I asked "What's a cupcake tin?" And then at nearly the top of my lungs "Mom! Do we have any cupcake tins?"

Then I had 2 women laughing at me as mom came upon the scene and Barb through her tears of laughter explained what I was trying to do. THAT was the last time I tried to make cupcakes, and as I write this I'm 59 years old!

What the Father taught me that day...

...was to be teachable. To take a step back from future projects before I ever started them to see the whole process from start to finish. To know each step along the way and know for certain what materials were needed, what each step would look like, and to be open to instruction and learning.

I didn't know it then, but that lesson served me well in later years when assembling cheap furniture, fixing toilets, plumbing under the sink repair, installing a garbage disposal, wiring a ceiling fan, fixing a

lawn mower, and other things around the house too numerous to mention. But there was a larger lesson to be learned.

Rule the house?

As I said last week, my earth-dad wasn't in my life much at all in my teen years, so it was the Father God I looked to on how to be a (future) husband and father. One day after the cupcake incident of 1975 with thoughts of how to be a good husband on my mind, I was reading I Timothy 5:14:

"I want therefore the younger widows to marry, have children, rule the household, and give no occasion for the enemy..."

I said, "Father! Paul said the wives were to rule the house, but I thought the husband was the head of the house!?!". Immediately He responded. "What is the house?" I thought for a second then replied, "The house is the physical building, the electrical, the plumbing, the walls, decorations, roof and so on." "Very well. And what is the home?"

Immediately my mind flashed to our friends the Harvey's. When I went to their house it always felt like love - peaceful, secure, and safe, so I responded; "The home is the intangible qualities of the house like love and peace and safety and feeling secure." He said, "Very well. The wife is the head of the house, and the husband the head of the home. Can you understand that?"

I said, "I've never heard that before. But that means if the wife is to rule the house as Paul said, then if the kitchen sink is clogged she can fix it herself. (I was genuinely trying to figure it out, but I admit I thought I had Him with that comment) He replied; "She may fix it herself, or she can delegate it to her husband. For if the house isn't in good working order the intangibles of the home will suffer. So it is up to the husband to make sure the intangible qualities you spoke of are maintained, meaning he would need to fix the sink if she doesn't want to do it. That's part of laying down your life for her."

Ever since that teenage moment I've been keenly aware of my responsibility as head of the home as Barb is head of the house. That lesson served me well in our first month of marriage in our tiny apartment located at 20 Beechtree Court, in Charlotte, North Carolina. The kitchen trash bin was full, and of course the trash container is part of the house. Barb stated the obvious: "The trash can is full. You need to empty it." I said, "You topped it off; you empty it." She said "No. That's your job, I'm not going to empty it."

The first rule if you want to get out of a hole is to stop digging that hole.

I didn't know that then, so I said, "In my house whoever topped off the trash can was the one who had to empty it." She replied, "In my house my dad always emptied the trash." That's when I stopped digging by remembering the Father's lesson above. I've been emptying the trash ever since because...if the house isn't working properly and in good order, the home will not have those intangible qualities of love, peace, security and safety.

Many people enter into relationships for what the other person can do for them. How many marriages fail, friendships fail, careers fail, because people are entering into a relationship not for what they can give to the workplace or friendship or marriage, but what that spouse, that friend, that job can do for them?

I wanted to give those cupcakes for the good cause, but I needed teaching on how to do it - my heart was in the right place but my method was wrong. The fact is, human nature judges others by their actions, but we judge ourselves by our motive. And the unteachable person demands they be judged by their motives - they don't want anyone to correct them as to method, they just scream out for someone to see their good heart, their good motive. But we must be teachable as to our actions.

Relationships are built not only on motive, but action. God so loved the world...but what if He stopped there? What if His motive was for us, what if He loved us...but that is all we knew of Him? It is the last half of that verse that made a difference in our lives: "...that He gave His only begotten Son..." John 3:16 He loved, so He gave. Simple.

Motive, action, teachability. Maintain or repair the intangible qualities in your relationships. A person may have to build a considerable track record of success to restore the trust he or she once had. That

trust is part of the intangibles. A person may have to learn not to lie against or abuse nor speak ill of in public the person they say is their friend, spouse, or neighbor, co-worker - and it will take time to build a record of right words and actions.

BUT...let our actions revolve around the intangible qualities that make that house a home, that friendship more than a casual acquaintance. Work toward building up the fruit of the Spirit in a relationship, things such as love, joy, peace, gentleness, patience, kindness...Love, so demonstrate that love, being teachable along the way...

Another story from the past next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn
www.cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com

Relationships #3 - The Momma Ride

Hi all,

After my dad left our family when I was 11 years old, but before I came to know my heavenly Father about 5 years later at age 16, the Father was good enough to provide several godly men in my life that had a tremendously positive impact on my young and hurting heart. One of those men I refer to this day as 'Uncle Del'. Together with his wife 'Aunt Betsy', they opened their house and lives to me and my family, and later to Barb when we were dating teenagers. Their oldest son, about my age, and I were then and remain to this day good friends.

One of the ways they included me and our family was to invite us to their lake house each summer, only about a 75 minute drive from our homes. A few families in that circle of friends had bought homes that were side by side on the lake, so that when everyone was there at the same time and you counted all the families and kids we numbered I would guess close to 40 people.

Uncle Del had a large 'deck boat', which is to say a boat with a regular fiberglass hull, but the whole top was one flat deck surrounded by a railing and within was enough room to hold maybe 15 or 20 people. After a day filled with boating and water sports and children of all ages running around with this need and that, by evening the adults were in desperate need of time away from the thundering herd of children.

About an hour before sunset Uncle Del would call out loud enough for all to hear, 'Momma ride!', which was the signal for adults to begin gathering, and we teenagers and almost teens would soon be left in charge of the younger children while all the adults gathered on the boat for a slow cruise around the lake for about an hour (refreshing beverage in hand) - an hour of peace and quiet all to themselves - before they had to return to get the young ones washed up and to bed. Of course as teenagers we outwardly moaned about the nightly hour-long ritual of watching our younger siblings, but inwardly we were thinking 'an hour without any adult supervision!!!!' - yippee!

Momma rides were a mystery to us. Why did they need momma rides? What did they accomplish? What exactly did they talk about for an hour?

Ants and the holiness of taking time off

By outward appearance to my teenage mind, and I think Barb's at the time as well, momma rides served no purpose. But by the time we were married and had 3 young boys and were pastors of a rural Colorado church, the reasons for the momma rides of our teen years became abundantly clear.

Either Barb would look at me and say "I need a momma ride" or I would see it in her face and mercifully call out "Momma ride!" to the boys - which in land-locked Colorado meant get into the car and drive out into the open prairie or up into the mountains, either way momma needed to get out of the house. There would always be an adventure awaiting us - a lizard to catch, a prairie dog colony to watch, antelope grazing nearby, a flock of wild turkeys perhaps. And always physical activity in the form of walking, climbing hills and down into valleys, looking at wagon wheel ruts still in the prairie from pioneers 100 years earlier, ancient art pictures on rock walls, and so on. Sometimes when Barb just needed to be alone, she would announce 'momma ride' and take her bicycle for a couple hours riding along country roads through the prairie.

The mental and physical change of focus did wonders for our attitude and physical energy. Our evening car rides into the unknown were actually part of a scriptural example that started at the creation, when God decided He was finished after 6 days, and on the 7th rested from Project Earth. It wasn't that He was tired, the Hebrew indicating that He simply quit. Rest meaning to cease from doing something. Even then He was setting an example for us, for Jesus would later observe:

"The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27

We aren't to serve a day, but the day serves us. A day of rest was made for us, and the wisdom and value of taking time to rest took me years before I understood it. Our natural tendency is to produce something, and taking time off seems counter to that. But I like the example of Zechariah 4:1-6 in which 2 olive trees are seen, which produce oil to flow into a large bowl, and the large bowl spills its oil into a lamp which burns with God's flame. "Not by might, nor by power says the Lord, but by My Spirit."

The lesson is first to stay connected to the source of the olive oil - the oil being a type of the Holy Spirit, and the next is that our spirit is the bowl, which can only fuel the lamp and burn brightly for the Lord IF it is overflowing with oil into the lamp (our soul). In other words, we are to give people the overflow, but what is in the bowl is for us. Just give them the overflow, never what is in the bowl. That is for yourself. We've all been there - that place you're running on fumes, on empty, and must recharge. That is what taking a sabbath rest is all about - refilling the bowl to overflow status.

One day I read a study about ants that changed my life. Most Christians recall Solomon saying in his Proverbs to 'observe the ant' and all his hard work. (Proverbs 6:6)

But this study revealed ants divide their day into 3 parts. One third of the day they work hard, the second third of the day they do light work around the nest, and the last third they rest.

Hmmm....Momma Rides. using 1/3 of the day to rest, 1/3 to do light work, 1/3 to do heavy work.

Hmmm...balance.

My point about momma rides is simply this

Make time for your own version of a momma ride - some time to recharge, rest, recharge - yes, be like the ant. On a daily basis divide your days into thirds to strike a balance. When Paul was in Ephesus (Acts 19) and we are told he taught daily in the school of a man named Tyrannus, we know from history and culture the people of Ephesus worked hard from sunup to around 11am. Then they took a break until 4pm (16.00) - it was no doubt in the 11am-4pm time frame that Paul taught. After 4pm they would return to work for a couple hours to finish up the day. That looks like dividing into thirds to me. Morning is hard work, take a break, return for light work. Done.

Find what works for you and don't judge one another - but judge yourself as to whether you are doing your body any good. Find your momma ride, and take it.

New event in our lives next week...until then, blessings,
John Fenn

www.cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com

Relationships #4, The Sparkles on the Casserole incident

Hi all,

When our 3 boys were young they always seemed to be as hungry as bears coming out of their dens at the end of a long winter. "How long to dinner?" was a daily question, and Barb always did a masterful job of making our few dollars stretch so that no one went hungry, and more than that, that we were always filled to the full.

One of the favorite meals was home made macaroni & cheese with bits of ham throughout, all baked into a 9" by 13" (23cm by 33cm) glass casserole dish. Side dishes were always a green vegetable like green beans or broccoli, and always with applesauce. It was one of those meals Barb could prepare

ahead of time in the glass baking dish, cover with clear plastic wrap that clings so well, and set it in the refrigerator until ready to heat up.

One such evening as we sat around the table like a pack of wolves surrounding our prey of macaroni & cheese, the light caught the top of the food in a way that seemed to make it sparkle - I thought I must be really hungry to be seeing macaroni & cheese with sparkles! But then Barb saw it too from her end of the table. She immediately called out "STOP", extending her hands to stop one of the boys first fork full of food. "Did I take the plastic wrap off the dish before I put it in the oven? Oh no! I don't think I did."

Like forensic scientists examining the evidence, we leaned closely over the casserole to examine the sparkles. What appeared to be shards of glass littered the top of the macaroni & cheese, but were soft and flexible, much to Barb's horror and embarrassment. She being one to see the world cut and dried immediately went to worst case scenario - thinking she was about to poison her family, that she has never done anything like this before, numerous and profuse apologies, thinking out loud about having to throw the whole thing out and what to feed us all...

I stepped in, being a more 'big picture' type of person and pulled her and dinner back from the brink. Whatever had been clinging to the top of the casserole was now melted away, and we could remove the top layer of food and eat the rest. That is what we did, and the Sparkles on the Casserole Incident became the stuff of family legend.

Always smooth sailing?

The dinner was delicious of course, but we had to make our way through the 'poison' on the top layer to get to the meal. Our walk with the Lord is like that in many ways - we expect answered prayer to mean everything works out smoothly, calmly, like a yummy spiritual macaroni & cheese meal; What a banquet the Father made for us. But usually there are potentially hazardous things that accompany the answered prayer which are up to us to avoid.

The gospel culture most of us were raised in presents the smooth sailing version of faith. But that doesn't line up with scripture nor our experiences, and that often leaves us confused as to whether God is really in what we are doing. We think if it is God why aren't things going better? That reveals we have been taught incorrectly.

Jesus is of course our example, and though we marvel at Him feeding a multitude or raising the dead, the path to our salvation required Him to go to the cross. In John 21:15-19 immediately after Jesus asks Peter to 'Feed my sheep' He also tells Peter the means by which he would die a martyr's death. When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus outside Damascus and called him to preach to the Gentiles, the Lord also told him the things he would suffer* if he chose to accept the call on his life. *Acts 9:16

On a smaller scale which is to say for you and me, we turn to II Peter 1:3-4 which says "...Through which are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might become a partaker of the divine nature..."

The gospel we have been taught has been only the first part of this verse - exceeding great and precious promises have been given to us - and if we focus on that alone it leads to the erroneous sort of faith that turns God into the One who fixes our mistakes and if we have enough faith everything in life will just smooth out one day.

The second half of that verse however says 'that you might be a partaker of the divine nature'. In other words, we look at promises as God keeping His Word to us, but He looks at the promises He gives us as a means for us to become more like Him. Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. Peter was told when he was old others would take him where he didn't want to go. Paul was told what he would suffer IF he chose Jesus. (Hebrews 5:8; John 21:18, Acts 9:16)

We see the promise as an answer, He sees the promise as a means to grow us. The delicious macaroni & cheese IS there, but first you have to get through the jagged things on top that if not handled correctly, could hurt you.

That is why the observation was made that it is through 'faith and patience* we inherit the promises'- there is no microwave action available to rush the answer; if you want the answer you need to grow in Christ. You need to think as the Father and Lord do, to use the promise as a means to be more Christ-like. *Hebrews 6:12

Angels?

In the early 1980's some friends of ours named Dennis and Jeanne were about to leave the USA with their 4 children to become missionaries in the nation of Panama, eventually to live among the Choco Indians of the Darien' jungle.

As friends gathered around to lay hands on them to send them forth into ministry, several prophecies came forth, including one that mentioned angels would be active in their ministry. While everyone was excited like little school children about the word that angels would be active, a friend noticed Dennis was not excited at all, but was just sitting there quietly. He asked if he was excited that angels would be active. Dennis replied, "No. Because that means we're going to be in situations that need them."

Everyone there saw the promise and went ooh and aah over the idea of having angels involved with them. But Dennis saw the rest of the word and therefore received deeper revelation about why there would be angels. Great and precious promises, yes. That we might be partakes of His divine nature. Yes - both work together if we allow. I

Examine your heart

Grace is always conditional. You give a 16 year old the car keys, that's grace. You want the kid and car back by 11, that's the condition of grace. You have people in to your home for house church, that's grace. Stay out of rooms where the door is closed and remember you are a guest in someone's house, that is the requirement. You get hired over 10 others for a job, that's grace. You showing up and working hard and doing what is required, that's the condition. Salvation offered is grace. If you want it you must come through Jesus Christ. Whatever God promises to us (grace), He has an expectation we will use that promise as a means to partake in His nature.

Many people go round and round over the same lesson because they refuse to do the 2nd half of that verse. Examine yourself, your life, your life experience - do you see patterns repeating themselves? Examine (now) how you can grow in Christ. Look at the fruit of the spirit of Galatians 5 and judge yourself if you are living those while you wait for the fulfillment of the promise. You will find if you are filled with and focus with being Christ like in the midst of 'faith and patience', instead of being fearful and doubting, you'll find peace and assurance saturating your soul. Being a believer in Jesus is easy. Being a disciple of Jesus will cost you your life as you knew it.

Another incident from the lives of John & Barb next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn
cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com

Relationships #5 - The forks are always up

Hi all,

Barb and I are very different in many ways; She is a 'pack rat', meaning she holds onto things if they have the slightest bit of sentimental value or memory attached to them, while I tend to follow the 'If I haven't used it in a year I don't need it' philosophy of storage. If I fill a large plastic trash bag full of things I don't want any longer and set it out side to be disposed of, she walks out of the house and goes through everything I threw out just to be sure there isn't anything 'of value' she wants to keep.

Although truth be told at this point in our marriage more often than not she is anticipating my actions and says: "Before you put that sack outside let me go through it". To me that's just plain wrong, slightly insulting, and frustrating the whole process of getting rid of things. To her it is quality control, as if

some trash man would open the sack of trash and find a label saying "Inspected by Barb Fenn and proven to have nothing of value to her."

When the Word...

...says in Ephesians 5:25-26 the husband is to love and therefore lay down his life for his wife as Christ did the church, on a practical level it means I lay down what I think is right in trash disposal and other areas, and don't get angry at her for taking half the things out of the trash sack only to store them in the garage (which makes clutter for me).

She has an eye for detail and is very good at naturally selecting seasonal decorations that go well together; I tend to group things by symmetry. It is autumn right now in the US so she has decorated the house accordingly. All our household decorations and the ones on our front and back porches are coordinated to oranges and tans, yellows and muted reds, while I look at the pumpkins and gourds of various sizes, colors, and textures and make sure they are balanced and symmetrical. If there are 3 gourds on one side of a display and 4 gourds on the other side, something must be done to even it out - to me that is the right way to make a display, symmetrical, balanced.

We work amazingly well together in this as long as I remember she is the brains and I am the muscle. She decorates the house and porches according to what she thinks is right, then calls me in to give my opinion about how it all looks. I look at the symmetry and presentation and comment accordingly. It works. Most of the time. But that is her domain so she always has 51% of the vote, lol. Okay, maybe 95% of the vote, okay 100%, but I gladly defer to her as she is amazing and the house always looks nice and comfortable. She is absolutely right, that if I was single not a thing in the house would change by season, so she makes me look good, lol.

We will go through this process again come the first of November, for with the turn of the month we are approaching the US celebration of Thanksgiving, which means displays of turkeys and pilgrims will be added to fall decorations, replacing the ones that are strictly autumn themed. And once again boxes go into and out of the attic and garage by my strength and patience as 'we' decorate the house...I can hardly wait to bring out the Christmas decorations!!! LOL

I'm the one to walk into a home and first notice the picture on the wall that isn't quite hanging level, and am tempted to put it 'right' with just a nudge on the low corner to bring it into balance. Barb scans the room, notices all the decorations, and compliments our host or hostess on what a beautiful home they have.

The dishwasher - argh!

A long time ago in what seems like a galaxy far, far, away, we owned a couple of pizza delivery stores. I was an unpaid Associate Pastor at the time and the pizza stores paid our bills while my heart was with the people, the church. It was at that time according to Barb, I began taking over kitchen cleaning duties at home. As the pizza stores had to be cleaned well nightly, somehow that habit carried over to the house, a chore Barb willingly turned over to me.

So now at over 39 years of marriage as I write this, the routine is set. I load the dishwasher in the evening and turn it on so that we have clean dishes in the morning. When Barb cooks she uses pots and pans, plates and measuring cups as she needs them and sets them aside. When I cook I clean everything by hand when I'm done with it. When I'm done the kitchen is clean. When she is finished cooking it looks like a tornado went through the kitchen, and she does this knowing her loving husband is coming along before bedtime to clean it all up. Hey...it works. But there are times I'm traveling or out all day and she does a load of dishes.

When she loads the dishwasher she puts forks and knives into the utensil trays points up, leaving lots of sharp points to greet my fingers as I put the clean dishes away. To me that is just wrong because I don't want anyone's fingers all over the fork as it was put away, that I'm later going to put in my mouth. I put the forks and knives in pointy end down into the dishwasher so when clean I can put them away without touching the pointy ends, keeping things as sanitized as they were when they came out of the machine.

Different isn't necessarily wrong; it's just different

Learning that different isn't necessarily wrong was a natural thing for me as it fits my personality. By my nature I can see another person's point of view, my point of view, and much of the time, God's point of view and I want HIS point of view always. I will change or apologize and/or repent as soon as I see my wrong, and if the other person is wrong I expect them to apologize or repent. I'll love them to the degree they allow me no matter what their perspective is. But generally speaking, different isn't necessarily wrong and I will adjust and go with the flow. You must want love and peace and righteousness in life more important than being right.

Barb's personality is very strong for righteousness and she hates sin and hypocrisy, sort of like John the Baptist or Elijah - right is right and wrong is wrong and there is no point of discussion. I love that about her, her zeal, her intensity coupled with an easy laugh and sense of humor.

But that personality and gifting means in many things her way IS the right way, end of discussion. Different to her quite often DOES mean it is wrong. Over the years I've become more like her, and she has become more like me. She believes the way she puts the pointy ends up in the dishwasher leads to a cleaner utensil, and that means no one eating at our house will ever get sick nor will she be embarrassed by a dirty fork set at a guest's plate, and if you make sure your hands are clean when putting the forks and spoons and knives away, a slight touch on the eating end a week before it is next used won't harm anything. She is completely correct of course, yet at the same time she has no problem with how I load the dishwasher.

I am also correct in the belief utensils will get just as clean my way of doing things, AND I don't have to take the risk of handling the eating end of the utensil. Both of us are right, both of us are wrong. Genesis 5:2 says of the Lord; "He called their name Adam in the day in which they were created." Eve did not receive her name until after they had sinned. All the time before that they two were called Adam, for out of him she had been fashioned, so the two of them were truly two parts of one person.

Submit doesn't mean obey

We do as Ephesians 5:21 says, submit one to another. Submit doesn't mean obey. Submission is a condition of the heart. Obedience is an action. I am always submitted to my wife as she is always submitted to me, but we don't always obey one another as in the examples above. When I set the trash out and she 'disobeys my wishes' she is still submitted to me in every way. We make allowances for one another. It's called love.

The Lord had finished creating at the end of day 6, and He wasn't about to start again, so when Adam determined he needed a mate, the Lord had to use what He had on hand - what He had previously created. Thus the word 'formed' is used of her body, not created. He formed her body out of material gained from Adam's body, and He also formed her soul (emotions, reasoning, will) from his. Her spirit like ours, was created by the Father*, but the rest of her was formed out of what He had previously created. *Hebrews 12:9, Zechariah 12:1)

That meant they were 2 parts of a whole person. They were opposites of each other. Those opposite qualities were meant to compliment one another, to provide both sides of an issue to the whole, and to cause each of them to learn love and growth in Christ as they deferred to one another, recognizing their mate had qualities they lacked.

Don't get me wrong...

There are absolutes, and if a person crosses those lines they are definitely wrong, not just different, but wrong. Right is right and wrong IS wrong. But how you remove trash, decorate the house, or load a dishwasher, it's just different, not wrong.

This little bit of transparency into our lives is intended to be an example for others on how to get along and actually love the differences in your mate or friend or relative - and while there can be and often is tension between us as we each (with raised voices sometimes) put forth what we think is right, we both work at love to dispel the tension and one of us will end up making the decision by mutual agreement, and the other will be at 100% peace. Of course we each reserve the right to say "I told you so", lol.

Love righteousness and therefore love right-ness in your life, more than loving being right. Humble yourself to your mate, friend, relative, neighbor when righteousness says what you think is right is actually wrong in their eyes, and keep the peace, grow in love.

The last of this series next week...I think...until then, blessings,
John (and Barb) Fenn
www.cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com

Relationship #6 - Ed. Or the Horse Jumping the Tricycle Incident of 1988

Hi all,

When we lived in Colorado I had a horse I named Josiah (In heaven I may need to apologize to King Josiah, but my horse was good and zealous like him) :)

I used to love riding out on the open prairie of Colorado with him, where there are no fences and only miles and miles of prairie, cactus, prairie dog towns, and a particular plant Josiah love to jump over, the Spanish Bayonet. The Spanish Bayonet resembles exactly that - it has long, thin, hard spikes up to about 3 feet long (1m) arranged like a bouquet splaying out in all directions. We would be at a gallop and I'd try to steer him around the plants, but he would ignore me and head right for them so he could jump.



He loved jumping those things, and anything else that height as well, which is unfortunate because my son on his tricycle was that height.

The tricycle incident

Brian was then 3 and he had a tricycle that he rode all over the property. This particular day he got himself into a mess as only a 3 year old boy can. Somehow he managed to get himself and his tricycle into Josiah's corral, and was riding around full speed chasing the horse from one end of the corral to the other playing 'tag'. Barb came screaming to me that Josiah was in a panic and going to kill our son and to come quickly!

As I ran to to the corral I saw Josiah running full speed towards Brian, and with perfect timing jumped completely over him, his hoofs missing Brian's head with plenty of daylight to spare. He did it 2x that we saw before I arrived to vault over the top rail of the corral and in one motion pick up Brian and lift him out of the corral to Barb's waiting arms. Whew! Close call. Brian thought he was playing tag with the horse, and maybe the horse thought that too, but we could see the danger.

How we initially understand situations determines faith or fear, boldness or cowardice, believing the best or believing the worst of someone. We and the Lord see the same situation; Do we want His perspective or ours? Do we jump to conclusions or wait for all the facts? Was it a horse intent on killing our son, or a game of tag?

Barb and I concluded Josiah's good nature caused him to jump over Brian, but he was agitated that Brian was in his 'space'. Game or not, it was a dangerous situation, but no malice on the part of the horse was evident. In fact it was his tender care to jump over Brian that proved he meant him no harm.

That part - whether our horse intended harm or not - could not be known at the first. We had to gather all the facts and see how he treated Brian before coming to that conclusion. Had we assumed he wanted to kill him it would have meant I would have had the horse destroyed. If we draw conclusions for the worst upon initially encountering a situation we might react with offense or anger, when none of that was intended.

Who is Ed you may ask?

In Joshua 22 we have the story of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh setting up an altar, a mizbe'ach in Hebrew, at their border with the other 10 tribes of Israel. A replica of the original sacred altar used by Aaron and Moses was never done before, so the other 10 tribes thought Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were going to usurp the authority of the priesthood and start making their own sacrifices. The 10 tribes gathered themselves for war against their brethren.

When the counsel was called before the attack, the 2 1/2 tribes explained it was not as they assumed, for that altar was not built to make sacrifices upon, but rather as a witness on their border so all would know that they were following the Lord God of Israel alone. The 10 tribes saw the altar and assumed the worst, while the intent of the 2 1/2 tribes was to show their zeal and faithfulness to God.

At that point all 12 tribes decided to name the altar Ed. The Hebrew word Ed translated into English and using English alphabet, means witness or testimony. That marker, that boundary altar intended to be a statement of faith by the 2 1/2 tribes, was mistakenly understood to be a statement of rebellion by the other 10 tribes.

Don't jump to conclusions

We could have concluded Josiah was trying to kill Brian. He thought he was playing tag. We had to gather the facts before making a right judgment on the situation about Josiah's intent and motive. 2 1/2 tribes built an altar to tell the world they were serving the God of Israel, 10 tribes thought they were usurping God given ordinances. It took time and talking before they understood the motives of the 2 1/2 tribes.

Why at first did they automatically assume their brothers were guilty of sin? Why were they so willing to go to war based on those mistaken conclusions? Are we also instantly ready to go to war with someone because they offend us? Do we end the relationship because they offended us without first checking our own actions to see if we played a part in the exchange?

Do we conclude they have an attitude against us when maybe they are looking for some acknowledgement that we had a part to play in it? Shouldn't we look at our own actions to see if we were first in the wrong before we blame them? Jesus said to remove the 'beam of timber' (Greek) from our eye before trying to remove our brother's splinter (literally, dry speck, saw dust) from his. Matthew 7:3

Jesus used the eye as the parable, meaning how we see things, how we perceive someone else's actions. One who jumps to conclusions is as one who has a large beam in their eye obscuring their vision and ability to see the whole picture - the beam is blocking their view and skewing what they think they see.

It is true we tend to judge others by their actions while we judge ourselves by our motives. What if we looked first at how our actions contributed to the misunderstanding? What if we waited until we could hear or see a motive before jumping to offense? Don't assume the worst, and check your heart first.

Examine your heart. That altar you take offense at may be another person's statement of faith.

Gather more information, don't assume the worse just yet...and look for the Father's provision in each situation. In this way we learn patience and love, and righteousness.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,

John Fenn
www.cwowi.org and email me at cwowi@aol.com