

OUR #1 RELATIONSHIP

By Marjorie F. Eddington

The very fabric of life is comprised largely of relationships. According to Rodale's *Synonym Finder*, "relation" means "connection, tie, bond, union; connectedness, relatedness; interconnection, interdependence; closeness, nearness; kinship." We all appreciate the positive aspects of closeness, and we all have to deal with difficult facets of our various relationships: friends, siblings, parent/child, classmates, teacher/student, girlfriend/boyfriend, boss/employee, colleagues, and more. How effectively we work through our relationships with others so that they remain strong yet flexible, loving yet growing really depends on how well we establish our connection with God.

It is our relationship with God that is the most crucial, valuable, essential relationship of all. How do we know that? Christ Jesus affirmed:

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. **Mark 12:29-31**

First, we must love God. Then, we love our neighbor as ourselves. In fact, we really can't love our neighbor as ourselves until we love God. Often we give so much attention to maintaining or fixing our relationships with our neighbors — friends, parents, others — that we neglect our relationship with God. And yet, our relationship with God determines how we view every other relationship in our experience. If we aren't right with God, we can't be right with others.

In order to clarify and strengthen our relationship with God, it's helpful to think of God as our Best Friend, our Parent.

As a Best Friend, God...	As a Parent, God...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Answers us whenever we call. He is never too busy for us.• Tells us we're beautiful, always.• Is completely committed to us.• Inspires us moment by moment.• Meets all of our true needs all the time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loves and cherishes us unconditionally.• Gives us direction and guidance.• Disciplines us lovingly.• Comforts us eternally.• Protects us powerfully and continually.

The benefits of nurturing our relationship with God as our Best Friend and Parent are obvious. No one person or combination of people can consistently meet our needs—and no human should be expected to do so. But God does. Our relationship with God should be the most fulfilling and wonderful relationship in our lives. When it is, it is also the most rewarding.

So how do we nurture our relationship with God and make God our #1 priority?

PRACTICAL TIPS

For some specific ideas on how to get our relationship with God straight, let's turn to an expert, Abraham, whose life proved that making God our #1 priority opens us up to incredible blessings.

The Bible tells us that Abraham was "Set-Right-with-God" (The Message Gen. 15:6). His biography as told in Genesis reveals six key ingredients, or practical tips, for aligning ourselves with God, which will bless us and strengthen our relationships with others.

1. **Listening:** First, Abraham listened to God. When Abraham was 75, God told him to leave his homeland and go to a place that God would show him.
 - Practice listening to God. Sometimes it's difficult when there seem to be several "voices" telling us different things to do. But we can detect God's voice. It's calm, powerful, clear, moral, truthful, and persistent.
 - Practice listening to others. Everyone wants to be heard. But do we really know how to listen? Listen to *understand* others. Listen to learn. Be open-minded. Be an active listener.
2. **Courage:** It took courage to worship one God, to establish a new faith and a different relationship with God since all the people around Abraham worshipped several gods. It took courage for Abraham to follow God's direction, to step out on his own — mentally, spiritually, and physically — and move across the country.
 - Have the courage to take a stand for principle. Refuse to compromise your integrity just because it's easy or because others are cheating. Making this stand requires moral courage.
 - Ask yourself: "How can I live my life with moral courage and integrity?" Write down the answers and start putting them into practice, even if it's just one idea at a time.
3. **Obedience:** Once Abraham heard God's voice, he obeyed. He took his entire family with him, even his nephew Lot and his nephew's family.
 - Do what God tells you to do, no matter how big or little. Don't ignore God's directions. Usually we can hear God's voice. It often takes courage and trust to follow through on His directives. Obeying God on the little things (homework, entertainment, food, exercise) makes it easier to obey his commands regarding more significant decisions.
 - Practice obedience — to your parents, teachers, and superiors. If we can't obey people we can see, how can we obey God? Obedience to God will always save time, energy, effort, steps — even lives.
4. **Yielding:** Leaving his homeland required Abraham to yield up his future plans. Furthermore, when quarrels between Abraham's men and Lot's men broke out due to the lack of land for their livestock, Abraham stopped the arguing by yielding. He gave Lot

the first choice of the surrounding land. Lot decided to live on the plains of Jordon (Sodom and Gomorrah), which later were destroyed. Then, God gave Abraham all the rest of the land that his eyes could see to him and his descendents. What a gift beyond his expectations or yearnings — due to his willingness to let go! Abraham's solid relationship with God enabled him to have a harmonious relationship with Lot.

- Post this phrase on your fridge or mirror: "Let go, and let God."
 - Practice yielding — first to God, then to others. Yielding up your own will or opinion of how something should be done or said frees you from a lot of burden and false responsibility. Yielding also opens us up to new ideas and opportunities that can strengthen our relationships with others.
 - Be willing to give up what you want to do if God tells you to do something different, even if it doesn't seem to make sense at the time. Who can see around the corner? Only God can. Yielding to God is easier when we trust Him.
5. **Trust:** Abraham certainly trusted God to guide him and take care of the needs of his family. Throughout his experience, Abraham gained a greater sense of trust and finally learned to trust God completely. When Abraham first set out, God had promised him that he was going to father a great nation, that he would have an heir. It took about 25 years for that promise to be fulfilled and Isaac to be born — when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 91.
- Put one of these simple notes inside your wallet or purse: "Trust God completely!" or "Where is my trust?" This will help remind you that with every decision that comes your way, you can turn to God for the answers, listen to Him, and obey His guidance because you trust God's direction.
6. **Commitment:** Abraham was so committed to God that he was willing to sacrifice his only son because he thought that's what God wanted him to do. Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, an angel of God called to him. Abraham responded with, "Yes, I'm listening" (**The Message** Gen. 22:11). Abraham's commitment to listen to God every moment enabled him to hear God's angel message telling him to save Isaac and sacrifice a ram instead. Since Abraham put God first and foremost, God rewarded him and all mankind: "All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me" (**The Message** Gen. 22:18).
- Examine the level of your commitment to God honestly and thoroughly. How much time do you spend listening to God and working to understand God? Do school, friends, sports, drama, entertainment, even family come before God?
 - Make a commitment to put God first, to learn more about God daily. This does not require you to spend all your time studying the Bible. It does require that you turn to God first, pray daily, and spend some time studying the Bible each day (even if it's only 5 minutes).

As a result of Abraham's commitment — which started with listening, and required courage, obedience, yielding, and trust — God blessed not only Abraham, but "all nations." If we, like Abraham, put God first and foremost above everyone and everything, and if we get ourselves right with God, then our lives and our relationships will be a blessing to ourselves and to the world.