



John 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Too close for comfort

My wife was running errands with two of our daughters. I went on a walk with our younger two daughters into the backyard. We enjoyed the scenery as we walked. They showed me rocks embedded with fossils and they picked flowers for me. We finally came to the back of our property and stood under the two-story fort that our boys built under a canopy of shade trees. The girls climbed the make shift stairs that lead to the top floor and looked around as if on top of the world. They were amazed by the clear view they had of the surrounding fields. “You can see forever up here,” they remarked. When you’re not yet four feet tall, forever is a pretty short distance. “Daddy, can we go into the field?” Our yard butts up against a horse farm and hay field. “We better not” I said. “The last time you went in the field you brought ticks back with you and we don’t want any more ticks in the house.” We occasionally have ticks show up in the house from who knows where or what. From a distance that field is beautiful. Nearly three feet high, the green grass danced in the breeze. It really was picturesque. But, I knew we should stay away. Too many potential problems for my little girls and for the rest of us lurked in that field. By the way, my wife doesn’t like ticks.

Unfortunately, many people view relationships the same way. They keep their distance from one another for a whole host of reasons. Many times, their motive is pure but their reasoning is not founded upon scripture. Initially, we seem to have so much in common and are on the same side of so many issues. As time goes by, and we get close to one another, we start noticing imperfections, the ticks that we may not want to “carry into the house”. Well, relationships were designed by God to bring us close to Him and file off the rough edges of “self”.

How do we respond to a perceived shortcoming in a likeminded believer’s life? Do we see it as God-given opportunity to minister or a reason to exit that person’s life? With regard to these providential encounters, I encourage you to wholeheartedly embrace the words of the Lord in Matthew 7:1-5 *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* I realize that this is perhaps the most misquoted scripture of all time. However, that does not diminish its truth or the mandate with which Christ charges us. We all think our perspective is the right one. That is why Christ admonishes us in this passage to worry about ourselves because therein lies most of the problem. 1 John 3:16 tells us *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* He is

asking us to cooperate with him and willfully submit our will to his. Do you know how to do this? He is not asking us to die for our brethren, but to lay down our lives for them. To sacrifice and bless when circumstances would dictate the opposite. Can you lay down your life for a brother or sister that has hurt you or your friend?

We are not admonished to “love one another” twelve times in the New Testament because it is our natural tendency. We are exhorted to do so because we will hurt one another and disappoint one another. **It is good for us and our children to see the struggles of life accompanied by the application of God’s lasting solutions.** After all, these are the same struggles they will face later in life. Is that what your children are seeing on a daily basis in your home?

If we leave people to themselves and never alert them to possible problems we see in their lives, we simply become judges, pointing our finger at yet another offender and walking away from another casualty. It’s easier. Paul admonished, *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another* (Galatians 5:15). God was careful to instruct his people to apply these principles in their daily life:

*Psalms 78:2-8 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, **that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.***

A friend gave me some good counsel one day. He said in the midst of trials we have six things that we must do. He has a list for everything!!

1. Thank God for this situation because He is at work.
2. Put on humility and meekness, not rights.
3. Forgive even if you are not asked for forgiveness.
4. Put on gratefulness. This readies our heart and eyes to see what God is going to do.
5. Most importantly, Put on perseverance. Remain under the heat and don’t seek to relieve the pressure you feel around you. This is an invaluable tool God uses to help us to give control of our lives over to him.
6. Seek to reconcile.

So, whether it is protecting ourselves from the hurts of transparent living or a reluctance to help a believer that may be blind to a need in their life, it is clear that God has ordained these things for the growth of the body of Christ.

Proverbs 18:24 A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Is that you? Are you tallying excuses in your mind right now as to why you shouldn't speak to so and so? Will you lay down your life for

the brethren that have offended or hurt you? This is the life of service into which God calls each of us. Is it your desire to see that *"we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13)? There is a price, but it is worth it.*

Your co-laborer,

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