

# Navigating *Relational* LANDMINES

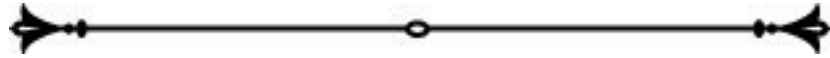


*A Collection of Relationship Tips*



JORJA G. STEWART

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# THAT GUIDE WHO MADE

## ALL THE DIFFERENCE

EVER BEEN IN a strange city – and ended up in an area that you shouldn't have? I remember on one of my trips, getting on the wrong train and getting off on a very wrong stop. Think about when you ended up in a place you didn't mean to go. How much you wished you would have known a different way...

Now picture being met at the airport before you get into trouble. Standing there is your own personal guide. Someone who is world-class at getting you on the right train and riding with you. Helping you stay clear of those areas that can be nothing but trouble. Pointing the way to places that bring joy and freedom and peace for your soul. That's for you and for those you're doing life with.

Jorja Stewart is that kind of "I'm right here with you" guide. And I think you made a great decision in picking up this book.

For over 25 years, my wife Cindy and I have had the honor and blessing of being close-knit friends with Jorja Stewart and her husband, Tom. I've met her awesome daughters and their families and seen how well Jorja has lived out the things she writes about in great times and very tough times. I've loved traveling with the Jorja and Tom and their son, Shon, to speaking engagements (and for Shon singing engagements) all over the country. You really get to know people when you travel with them. What I've seen in Jorja is courage and sincerity and wise choices she's made to love her family and her Lord well. Many of these same things are captured right here in this book. And written in a way that can help YOU do life wisely and well!

You'll find humor and hard-won wisdom here. A huge heart for God, grace, not judgement, and a "been there, done that well" reality reflected in each chapter. Things that can make a difference in your home and most important relationships - starting right now.

John Trent, Ph.D.

President, StrongFamilies.com

Gary Chapman Chair of Marriage and Family – Moody Seminary

Author of *The Blessing* and *LifeMapping*

I would like to thank:

Tom: Thank you for being such a patient, gentle, supportive and fun husband! You are a true role model to me in so many ways and I have great respect for you!

Our children, Shon, Heather and Kristy: What a joy and a blessing you are! You are proof of God's amazing grace! (Despite all of my mistakes, you turned out great!)

Lynne Gallian: Thank you for your insightful, loving and honest input in the initial proofreading.

Our son-in-law, Jonathan: Thank you for your patience and help with computers and publishing.

Our son-in-law, Joshua, and our friends and extended family members: Thank you for all your encouragement and prayers.

Words are inadequate to describe how much I appreciate each of you, so I will simply say THANK YOU!

## **PREFACE**

I HAVE JOURNALED FOR as long as I can remember. As a child, I called it a “diary.” As I got older, it sounded more “adult” to call it journaling. Either way, I simply had a compulsion to put my thoughts and experiences down in writing.

In 1983 (at the age of 33), I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I can look back on my life and see many Christians that influenced me, but the final leg of the journey toward salvation began with the premature birth and disability (cerebral palsy) of our first child, Shon. I realized that I was not in control of my life as much as I thought I was. When Shon was one and a half years old, I gave my life to Jesus. My prayer was simply, “Lord, take the driver’s seat in my life.” Little did I know how hard it would be to keep my hands off the steering wheel! I then began to write down the lessons I learned, largely through my many mistakes. Sometimes I would share some of my ideas with others. When I did, they said it blessed them.

Over the years, my husband, Tom, and many others, encouraged me to write a book, but I was too busy raising three kids to give much thought to that. I’d just say, “Maybe when the kids are grown.” Once the children had moved out, thoughts of writing a book returned to me, but the idea felt too overwhelming.

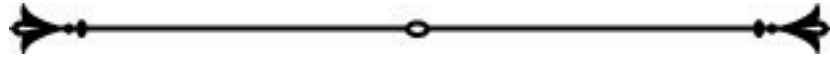
In 2013, after my husband and two others mentioned the idea of starting a blog, I finally agreed to give it a try. Our son-in-law, Jonathan, set it up and RelationTips was born. ([www.jorjastewart.com](http://www.jorjastewart.com)) I found that I liked this because there was no pressure. I could just post whenever I felt inspired to do so. Now I was on my way!

In 2018, I had the impression that God wanted me to “expand my audience,” but the traditional method of going through a publisher didn’t appeal to me. I didn’t want to be responsible for meeting someone else’s time frame. Jonathan suggested self-publishing a book and this is the result.

Most of the lessons I share are things I learned through my mistakes. As I told our children when they were growing up, I believe mistakes are redeemable as long as we learn from them. I have had my share of mistakes, insensitive words, selfish moments, and stubbornness, and I strive to find the lesson in them all. Sometimes God talks to me with a soft voice that I need to listen carefully to in order to hear. Other times, He lovingly hits me with a ton of bricks to get my attention (such as allowing me to suffer the consequences of my mistake)! I hope that sharing my experiences will help you find your way.

Any stories that I share about our family are shared with the permission of my husband and children. I do not have a supernatural memory. The stories and examples are taken from my journals. It is my hope and prayer that you will find something helpful in these pages, as I share my journey with you.

## A HELPMATE OR A NAG?



“A WIFE OF noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.”

(Proverbs 31:10, NIV)

I would like to be thought of by my husband as more precious than rubies, so I’m trying to be open to continual learning. One thing I had to learn was the difference between being a true helpmate versus a nag.

I always wanted to be helpful to Tom, but I found that I was often coming across to him as a nag. I finally discovered the difference. **A helpmate comes alongside her husband in the things he is *already* motivated to do. A nag tries to motivate him.**

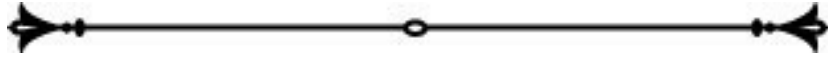
Here’s an example that illustrates a time when I unintentionally became a nag. Tom and I had bought into another person’s vision for us and we began to develop a ministry around that idea. We got as far as creating a website and writing a two- day conference. Where I became a nag was when I kept asking Tom if he was ready to write his parts or practice the presentation. He said he would when he was ready. We just got frustrated with each other. Finally, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “Stop!” So, I filed the materials and quit mentioning them. In time, Tom and I both realized that wasn’t our calling and we abandoned the project.

My second example illustrates a time when I was a good helpmate. Tom and I had always gone on mission trips together, but when an opportunity came up to go to Haiti for construction work, I did not feel led to go. Tom, however, was very excited about it and I was happy to help in any way I could. Tom admits that I’m more organized than he is, and he appreciates the help when I’m assisting him in doing something he’s already excited about. So, I read the emails and called our doctor to find out the time line for the necessary shots and how to get the appropriate pills. Then I relayed that information to Tom and he made the appointment. I also printed out the list of suggested items to pack, asked him which ones he wanted to take, and accompanied him on his trips to gather supplies. One day, I remained after church with some of the team members to help vacuum pack clothes to take to those in need. I also organized a prayer team. Each day, when Tom called to share what they’d done, I emailed up-dates to the prayer team. I enthusiastically agreed to financially support one of the children in the orphanage. Finally, when the team shared about their trip in church, I videotaped their individual talks and sent them to each team member. Even though I was not physically present with Tom in Haiti, we still worked together as a team, using our strengths to best advantage. It was satisfying to both of us and we rejoiced together over all that was accomplished.

We need to find out what our spouse’s interests are and encourage them in those areas. We should prayerfully rely on God to motivate our partner and keep our focus on helping them to accomplish their goals.

Is it all right for a person to express their desires and concerns to their spouse? Of course, if they do so lovingly and respectfully. But then we need to step back and wait to see if they do anything about it. If our desires are in alignment with God’s will for us, He will eventually bring it to pass, one way or another, if we rely on Him. If our desires are not in alignment with God’s, then He may need to change our hearts. I have learned that **God is the only one who can truly motivate someone.** If the Lord is in something, the motivation will come. To summarize, **we should cheer our partner on toward their goals, and be helpful in ways that they appreciate.**

## LESSONS FROM A DUCK



WE ONCE HAD a female Mallard duck and her six ducklings hanging out in our pool and fish pond for about 24 hours. We don't know where they came from or where they went, but during their brief stay, I had a review lesson in parenting.

We first saw them in our pool. It appeared that the babies were unable to get out. My husband raised the level of the water and we placed an upside-down pan on the top step to give them a boost. Some of the babies did figure out how to use the pan, but after observing them for a while, I removed it.

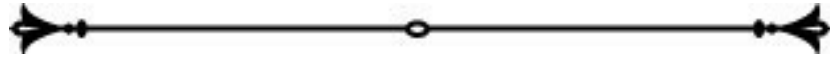
The mother would hop out of the pool and then call to her ducklings. They would flap their little wings and keep trying until they made it up onto the ledge. Once they were all out of the pool, the mother would give them a brief rest, then jump back into the pool with them following, and start all over. After doing this for a while, she gave them a rest, snuggled underneath her. Later, she explored the pond and bushes with them.

I realized she was building their stamina and, while our intentions were good, we weren't truly being helpful by making things easier for the ducklings. I remembered an article I'd read years ago about someone who caused a baby chick to become crippled by breaking the shell the rest of the way as it was pecking its way out. Apparently, the pecking process of breaking through the egg is necessary to the chick's development, even though it's hard work.

It takes much prayerful discernment to determine what our children are (or aren't) capable of, and just how much to help them. We don't want them to get frustrated to the point of discouragement, but neither do we want them to become lazy and unmotivated. We have to know when to let them fail or reap the consequences of their decisions. We also need to recognize when they truly need our assistance. There's a big difference, for example, between showing a child how to do his or her schoolwork and doing it for them. Even with grown children, we need to prayerfully evaluate when they truly need our help and when we might be unintentionally crippling them. The duck was a good reminder for me.



## LEARN TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE



### **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IS crucial to good communication.**

Suppose a friend of yours introduced you to a person from another country and that visitor was just learning your language. Imagine that, after the introductions, the foreigner very politely said, “It’s a pleasure to meet you. F...you.” You would probably be startled by the last two words, but would you be offended and angry? I wouldn’t, because I would know from his behavior that he didn’t intend to offend me. I might ask him where he learned those words, and if he told me someone had said that was a way of showing respect, I would gently tell him that they were playing a cruel joke on him and that those words were not appropriate.

I have been learning that men and women speak very different languages, which can lead to communication breakdown, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings.

Let’s start with a simple example. My husband often reminds me of things, and I *appreciate* that because I can be forgetful at times and I know he’s trying to be helpful. Even if I already remembered it, I thank him for the reminder. So, I *assumed* that Tom would also appreciate it when, as his helpmate, I reminded *him* of things. But that wasn’t the case. For example, we had our teeth whitened, and it required monthly follow-ups if the teeth were to remain white. One night I asked, “Do you want to do the teeth whitener tonight?” He said no, and since I’d been learning to clarify, I then asked, “Am I right in assuming that you would prefer that I not remind you again?”

He said, “Yes.” This puzzled me *until* I read that men don’t like to feel inadequate. Then it dawned on me that his interpretation of my reminder was that I felt he was inadequate, when *my* intentions were merely to be *helpful*. (When I asked, Tom confirmed my conclusion.) Doing for our spouse what we like having them do for us *might* backfire, if they misunderstand our motivation.

We should always give our spouse the benefit of the doubt. *Assume* they meant well until they prove otherwise.

One night, a simple misunderstanding afforded me great laughter!

I was at a table typing, and Tom was on the couch with our Bible study in his lap. He said, “Let me know when you’re at a good stopping point.”

I said, “Okay, I’ll finish this one paragraph and then quit.” I put the computer aside, went over to the couch, sat next to him, looked expectantly into his eyes and asked, “Did you want to talk?”

(I was assuming he wanted to discuss the Bible study.) He said, “No. I want to eat.” I burst out laughing because that was such a typical example of the differences between a male and female response! (By the way, my wonderful husband, who did most of the cooking at that time, had dinner ready.)

Due to the chemical differences in male and female brains, men may need up to seven hours to process complex emotional data that women may process within minutes! (See chapter 8 in [Sacred Influence](#) by Gary Thomas.) So, we need to **give them time to process**. When I have a “heavy” topic to discuss, something that works well for us is that **I write out all of my thoughts**. (This allows me to carefully choose my wording). Then I give Tom the letter and ask him to read it when he feels he’s emotionally up to it and get back to me with his response when he’s ready. This allows him the necessary time to process his thoughts and emotions.

I also have to continually remind myself not to be “pushy.” I have a post-it note reminder to

myself that says, “**Present, don’t persuade!**”

As Tom’s helpmate, my role is to humbly *present* my perspective to him. But it is *not* my role to try to *persuade* him to agree with me (that’s manipulation). His role is to carefully consider what I have to say and, whenever possible, work with me on finding a solution that we’re both at peace about. Ultimately, however, he is responsible for making the final decision.

In my presentations, I must always **evaluate my motivation** (*Why* do I want this? Am I being selfish?) and make sure that *how* I present the information is respectful and considerate.

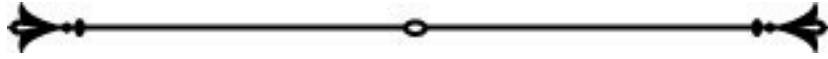
I must also try to **be very clear and direct** in my requests. I need to state what I want and why. I don’t know if the following truly happened, but it illustrates my point. I heard that one wife said to her husband, “The light bulb has burned out.”

He replied, “Yes.” To him, she was simply stating a fact. In her mind, she was making a request for him to fix it. It would have been better if she had said something like, “That light bulb needs replacing. Would you be willing to replace it when you can?” (If there’s a reason she isn’t able to do it, she could also explain that.)

Other aspects of communication involve praising our spouse for their strengths and thanking them for the ways they help us, asking about their interests and concerns, etc.

Too often, hurt feelings are simply a result of miscommunication. Couples will be much happier if they take the time to learn how to speak their spouse’s “language”.

## COMMUNICATION: GOD'S ROLE AND MY ROLE



GOD CONTINUES TO teach and remind me of things, such as what God's role is and what my role is in communication. My role is to **encourage, clarify, and present**. God's role is to **persuade and motivate**.

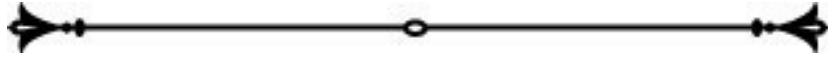
When I am humbly in the Spirit, my role in communication will be to encourage, clarify, and present. I'm *encouraging* when I come alongside someone in what they're *already* motivated to do. I'm *clarifying* when I *ask them questions* about their feelings and thoughts. I'm *presenting* when I calmly and humbly *share my ideas either for consideration or just for the purpose of letting someone know where I stand* on an issue or how I feel about something. I will be sensitive to, and respectful of, the other person's perspective.

When my pride takes over and I'm convinced I'm right, then I can become controlling and overstep my boundaries, entering into God's territory. I might find myself trying to *motivate* someone to do something I feel they should be doing, or I'll attempt to *persuade* them to agree with me. In other words, often without realizing it, I'm trying to take control. *God* is the only one who can change hearts. He alone can change a person's beliefs or motivate them to do something. I need to leave those things in His hands and just pray.

I am most guilty of trying to take control with those I love. It is good that I care deeply and want what's best for them. But it's wrong when I assume I have the answers and try to get them to do what I think is best. Even if I'm right, I need to let *God* be the one to reveal that to them. I must beware of giving unsolicited advice and opinions.

I want to up-lift people, not cause them to stumble. God is amazingly patient with me and, by His grace, I want to be equally patient with others. May He empower me to stay within my boundaries!

## DON'T IGNORE THE FACTS



BACK WHEN I was a fairly new Christian, I think I had erroneously come to believe that walking by faith meant I was supposed to ignore my feelings, lay aside all logic, and say yes to everything that appeared to be the unselfish thing to do. This belief system complicated the decision making process unnecessarily.

I'm going to share some samples from my 1992 journals, but in case you don't have time to read the examples, I'll begin with what I've learned.

When we're feeling overwhelmed and confused, we can ask ourselves the following questions (and perhaps discuss them with a trustworthy, objective person):

- 1) Laying aside, for a moment, our thoughts about what's right or wrong, selfish or unselfish, how are we **feeling** right now? Overwhelmed? Confused? Frustrated? Unappreciated? Tired? Or at peace, cheerful, refreshed, etc.? God doesn't ask us to *ignore* our feelings. He asks us to talk to Him about them. I love the Psalms in the Bible because they contain all the human emotions. God's big enough to handle them. Yes, He'll still love us even if we tell Him we're mad at Him or we think life's unfair. He's a great listener. It's okay to "vent." But then we should ask Him to reveal the *cause* of our feelings and show us what to do about it.
- 2) If we have a husband or children, it helps to ask ourselves how they are being affected by our present decisions and how the decision we're considering will impact them. The same applies to other relationships as well, such as friends, co-workers, etc. But I believe that, next to God, our family should be our top priority, so it's good to begin with them.
- 3) Ask God to reveal our fears to us. Do we need to entrust a loved one to Him? Our finances? Our reputation? List our fears.
- 4) Pray for wisdom and *wait* for clear answers and peace of mind. (The Lord may need time to help us work through our fears or our erroneous beliefs.) In *moral* decisions, we should let Scripture be our guide, and prayerfully follow our conscience.

I will now share some examples from 1992. At that time, our special needs son, Shon, was 11 years old and in 4th grade. Our daughters were 8 and 6 years old (Heather and Kristy). Tom and I had known the Lord nine years. Neither of us had been raised in Christian homes, so we had a lot to learn. Change came slowly. Things that are so obvious to me now weren't obvious then.

The first story I'll share centers around our son, Shon. Over the course of his school years, I homeschooled him at times, acted as his aid in school at times, and other times he was on his own in public special education programs. At the time of the situation I'm about to describe, he had spent two wonderful years going to a private Christian school part time. Now, he was in the 4th grade and the work was much harder. They graciously allowed a number of situations: he would just be in class for certain subjects, or I would be in class with him (sometimes with six-year old Kristy at my side) or we hired an aid to assist him. As the year progressed, we were faced with a difficult decision: was it time to place him in a special needs program in a public school? If I had followed the advice I outlined for you, the answer would have become clear fairly quickly. But we did not see the solution until we'd spent a year trying everything we could think of to keep him where he was, including trying to get a special needs program going at the school.

1) **How was I feeling?** Most of the time, I felt overwhelmed and frustrated. But I tried to embrace God's grace and I asked Him to help me be unselfish and uncomplaining. He did comfort and strengthen me, but I wasn't hearing His solutions.

2) **How was this affecting other people?** I found this note from Heather written on one page of my journal: "Mom I want a kiss. From Heather to Jorja." Kristy would periodically break down in tears and sometimes opt to leave a fun activity so she could have some snuggle time with me. Shon's teachers and aid voiced their concern about how much of his class time was wasted. (Ironically, I had been a teacher for eleven years and I doubt that I would have tolerated such a situation.) He couldn't read, so things had to be read to him, which either disturbed the other students or he had to be taken outside. I barely managed to keep up with the laundry, housecleaning, and cooking, and was exhausted by the time Tom came home from *his* exhausting day at work and long drive home. I did my best to meet everyone's needs, but often felt like a failure.

3) **What were my fears?** I feared that Shon wouldn't be morally strong enough to face what he might be exposed to in public school. I wanted to keep him in a protected Christian cocoon. I had to learn to trust God.

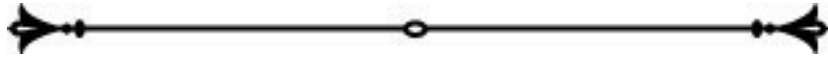
4) I did pray for wisdom (and God *finally* got through to us). For a long time I wasn't sure if by faith I should trust Him to open the doors for Shon to stay there and persevere, or if I was supposed to trust Him to take care of Shon in public school. When our situation became intolerable, I looked into public school. In time, we saw that the public school special needs program best met his educational needs and the Lord protected and blessed Shon there.

Here's a second example. During the same year, our church said there were Russian children who needed homes. We were praying about it and in this case, I did list my concerns. (When you read this, you'll see why I praise God that our kids turned out so well!) Here's an excerpt from my 1992 journal: "If I look at our circumstances, I say 'No way!' Kristy's showing signs of stress, wanting more of me. We don't always even get the kids' teeth brushed. They get baths about every two weeks or less. I have no idea how involved with Shon I'll be next year. Tom's just starting a second job, and both of his jobs are taking increasingly more of his time. I know it is mainly *my* shoulders this burden would rest on. So, there's no way I'll do this unless I'm *convinced* it's God's will, for I could *never* do it in my own strength. Also, Tom and I rarely talk as it is. Now enter an emotionally traumatized kid, who doesn't speak our language or eat our food. I'm a rotten cook, on top of it. I can't find one *logical* reason for saying yes. Yet my heart is open and my two greatest fears—the age and the sex—have been removed. So, this *could* be the Lord." (If you're wondering why our kids weren't more independent, that's another story.)

When I finally shared all my thoughts and feelings with Tom and asked if he could be content with the three children we already had, he simply said, "Sure," and that was the end of it!

In those days, we too often made decisions based on our emotions or we failed to communicate our feelings to the other person. Thankfully, we have learned to take our time, listen to each other, and prayerfully analyze the situation.

## CALM YOUR HEART



I AM LEARNING HOW important it is, when in a state of panic or anxiousness, to **STOP** (even sit down, if necessary), **PRAY** and **WAIT** for God to quiet my emotions so I can hear what He's trying to say.

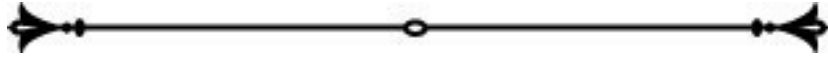
Too often, when I'm in a panic, I'll shoot up a prayer for help, but then I continue to try to solve the problem myself. Some simple examples are getting locked out of the house, losing the car keys when I'm about to leave for an appointment, or, after receiving an emergency phone call, trying to decide what to pack as I get ready to head out to help.

Sometimes I even turn to humans unnecessarily. One time, I couldn't get the house door unlocked. I was hot and frustrated. I prayed for help, but didn't allow God to calm me down. After a few more attempts, I called a friend. By the time they got to me, I had the door unlocked, so I inconvenienced them for nothing.

On the other hand, when I STOP what I'm doing, PRAY and WAIT for God's peace, then I'm in a state of mind to receive the thoughts He's trying to communicate to me. It works! I'll hear that still, quiet voice that tells me to push on the door as I turn the key, where to look for the keys, and what to pack before I rush out of town. Or, if I'm simply feeling overwhelmed and anxious, if I give God time, He'll calm those feelings, sometimes with a love touch like seeing a prism rainbow on the cupboard (which always makes me smile), or a thought to tackle the project a little at a time, or guidance on how to prioritize my activities. In other words, I need to trust Him to provide the help I need and stop trying to solve the problem myself.

So, when faced with negative emotions, I need to STOP, PRAY, and WAIT for God to calm my heart. Then I'll be more receptive to His guidance.

## LOVE IS PATIENT



THE BIBLE SAYS, “Love is patient.” (1 Corinthians 13:4, NIV) Let’s look at several aspects of patience. First of all, a patient person endures pain and trouble without complaining, losing self-control or causing a disturbance. Jesus on the cross is the supreme example of that! He demonstrated patient suffering in action—supernatural love. He endured the cross for our sake. (Note: For serious issues, such as abuse, I recommend seeking professional help.)

I truly admire people who can endure prolonged suffering with minimal complaints. I find that difficult to do. But I’ve learned that complaining doesn’t help anyone. If there’s something someone can *do* to help me, or even if I just need prayer, I can let them know in the form of a polite request. That’s different than complaining. I often fall short in the patience department even with *little* things, like a computer that doesn’t work, or trying to find a misplaced item or unscrew a well-sealed lid on a jar. My patience is tested daily and I often fall short.

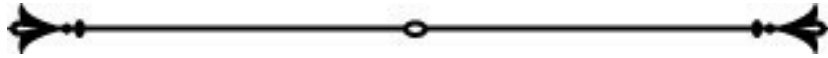
A patient person also exercises self-control when insulted. Jesus is the supreme example of this. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:22-23, NIV)

When *I* am slandered or falsely accused of something, my natural inclination is to defend myself. But experience has taught me that it’s pointless to do so, if the other person is not open to seeing any perspective other than their own. In such cases, it’s best to follow Jesus’ example of remaining silent and leaving it in my heavenly Father’s hands.

A patient person also *calmly* tolerates delay, confusion, or inefficiency. I struggle in all of these areas. I don’t like it when my plans are delayed. I also want quick answers to my questions and quick resolutions to my problems. Finally, it’s a challenge to be patient with people that I perceive as being inefficient, which is ironic since *I’m* frequently the inefficient one!

Patience requires great faith that God’s in control and that His timing and ways are perfect. Much of life is about waiting patiently on the Lord’s timing. We might as well accept it and learn how to do it! (We do it by trusting Him and surrendering to Him.) When there’s no longer a battle between our will and His, calmness settles in. *Peace comes with an absence of striving.* In our waiting, we need to “be patient and stand firm.” (James 5:8, NIV) Just like the farmer tending his crops while he waits for the harvest, God will give us things to do while we’re waiting for the answers to our prayers (even if it’s “just” the job of praying, which is actually the best thing we can be doing). We need to simply follow His lead without rushing Him, resting in His time schedule.

## GOD ADORES YOU!



THE **AUTHOR** OF love, our Creator, **adores** us!

God created us so that He could lavish His love upon us! Imagine that! We are the objects of His love, the apple of His eye! He loved us before we ever did a *thing*! He loves us when we obey Him, and He still loves us when we disobey Him. As a parent myself, I know that I may not always like my children's *behavior*, but I still love *them*!

When a man and a woman fall in love, they *respond* to the other's love for them. That is how God intended it to be between Him and us. He reaches out in love to us, and we respond to that love by reaching back to Him. Unlike human love, God's love for us never fades with time. His love is not dependent upon our actions. He will love us faithfully and fervently for all of eternity, if we have chosen to become His child through faith in Christ. I have heard it said, as an illustration of Christ's love for us, that when Jesus was asked, "How much do you love me?" He replied, "This much," and then He stretched out His arms on the cross and died.

The apostle Paul prayed that we would know "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." (Ephesians 3:18, NIV) It will literally take an eternity to fully grasp that. But we can catch a glimpse of it even in this lifetime, if we watch for it. "...the earth is full of his unfailing love." (Psalm 33:5, NIV). It is in His amazing creations—from the stars down to the tiniest invisible organism. It's found in human acts of kindness. (Think of all the times someone has reached out to you at just the right moment when you needed a love touch. Think of how people rally around disaster victims.) His love is in the strength He gives us to persevere in hard times, and it's in the tender way He comforts our souls when we grieve. It's in those moments when He intervenes and protects us from harm (ie; the near collision that you barely avoided while driving). It's in His hand of daily provision and blessings. Every breath we take is a gift of love from Him! Take time to just bask in His love.

"In him our hearts rejoice..." for our "...hope is in his unfailing love." (Psalm 33:21 & 18, NIV)