

## Revitalizing: Brotherly Love

I was compelled, inspired, burdened to read the book of First John this week. It can be really annoying when that happens. God, I don't want to. I don't want to write about loving my Christian brothers and sisters. I don't want to be too spiritual or feel like I'm stepping on toes. Oh, ouch, my own toes just got stepped on. The words aren't for someone else, the message is for me!

You know in the midst to summer heat, tempers rise with the temperatures. (Mine included.) Expectations of relaxing on a beautiful day are thwarted. (Mine included.) Plans to have fun in the sun just don't get made. (Mine included.) The days are longer and we often wear ourselves out filling the extra daylight hours. (Me included.) And we feel jealousy when we see or hear about someone doing what seems like so much fun. (Me included.)

Summer isn't what it was when I was younger. Not just as a child, but even as a young mom, taking my kids to tennis and swimming lessons and watching them play in the yard. I gardened more, just relaxed more. Now I feel almost as busy as any other time of the year, but I long for the 'lazy days of summer'. With the longing comes frustration. With frustration comes annoyance and with annoyance comes that ability to be easily angered. Some of the worst battles I ever fought with my sister occurred over summer break. Now you see where the book of First John comes in.

I have seen and experienced some annoyance with my family in Christ, and I bet you have seen me come close to crossing a line past annoyance (especially around VBS time!). The book of First John keeps reminding us that our love for Christ needs to be expressed by our love for fellow children of God. In fact, John gently tells us repeatedly if you don't love one another, you need to evaluate your relationship to Jesus. Because Jesus 'Spirit gives us love for one another. If you can't stand to come to church, if you can't stand to be around believers, you need to figure out what's going on.

"And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." I John 3:23 Did you notice that 'C' word twice: COMMAND. Christ commands us to love one another. That may take some doing, or maybe not. I John 4:7-8 says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

Okay, I said John was telling us gently, maybe not. But it is repeated. Obviously the beloved disciple was seeing issues with fellow Christians not showing each other much love. It was weighing on him. God made it apparent that this needed to be addressed.

Um,hmm—here's the thing—if you have asked Jesus to be leader of your life; if you believe He is God's one and only son; if you believe he died on the cross for payment of all your sins (and mine); if you believe that He rose on the third day and conquered death; THEN you believe you will spend eternity with Jesus. And guess what? All the other believers in Jesus will dwell in eternity with you, whether you like them or not: whether you have taken the time to get to know them or not.

In every chapter of First John, there is at least one verse about loving your family in Christ. Chapter four is the real focus. "We love because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) When we are crabby, frustrated, annoyed, that's human. When we overcome that human tendency and love our fellow believers we are reaching into the well of Christ's love for us and unstopping the fountain that God gives us. I love having what I call a "Holy Spirit Connection". That's when I meet someone and just know that they are a believer. It's not like a white aura and angels singing. It's more like that instant understanding between people. That's one of those benefits we receive from having the love of Christ in us and loving our brothers.

As I think about the youth and sponsors riding in vans for hours together, then living together in a cabin for a week, the potential for frustration and annoyance is high. But the potential for building that ability to love each other is also going to be amazing. At camp or in other places, you also can make some "Holy Spirit Connections".

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son purifies us from all sin." I John 1:7 So since it's summer, walk in the light of the Son. Come back to church and have some fellowship.

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