

January 13. Read Matthew 22:36-39. Have you ever felt discouraged? Like nobody has time for you or understands your situation? Or that you have little to contribute to a world that seems cold and unapproachable? I have. And unfortunately during these moments in my life, I have often made other people feel just as bad if not worse. Sometimes intentionally, but often my actions were unintentional. My pain and frustrations were causing more pain and frustration for others and creating a string of poor relationships. This pattern continued until I reluctantly accepted an invitation to attend a local church where I soon learned how to have a relationship with God. I always considered myself to be a Christian, but I had no idea about the most basic content of the Bible. As I would listen to the sermons, I became fascinated with how relationally based the Bible is—and our pastor would often preach that religion is about rules but Christianity is about relationships! Not only did my relationship with God become better, but so did the ones with my wife, children, bosses, employees, friends and strangers. The blessings suddenly started pouring in from every direction. I was experiencing new levels of joy and happiness. Even in times of opposition and conflict, I had more feelings of peace and security. I gained refuge from trusting God, and support from all the new people in my life. I now try to resonate these positive actions and feelings with those around me. I do this by encouraging, making quality time moments, showing understanding, investing myself, and by physical touch. I use the acronym EQUIP to help me stay on track and incorporate love into all my relationships. I challenge you to take a 5 day EQUIPped journey into your relationships. But for today, meditate our passage today and think about the impact you have on all of those around you.

January 14. Read Psalms 16:7, Psalms 7:17 & Ephesians 4:29. "(E)ncourage" I ask you, what are your words doing? Is your tongue building people up or tearing them down? Are you planting the seeds of success or foretelling a future of failure? Are you pouring courage into those around you, encouraging them, giving them the power to think, speak, try, and do things without fear? Or are you draining courage from people, discouraging them, paralyzing them not to do these things because you're sure they will fail you? To quickly start encouraging those around you, fill them with praise, appreciation and positive language. A simple, "Good job!" "Thank you!" and/or, "I love you!" can have an immediate positive impact. And not just for the recipient. The giver also receives the added benefits of things like better health and more happiness! I've found that when you sincerely allow your heart to build others up, the results can be phenomenal. Your words could be the spark that ignites a raging inferno in someone else whose fire was about to extinguish. So I challenge you to give out 5 forms of encouragement today, to people you would not normally do this with, and then sit back and watch what happens

January 15. Read James 4:14, Matthew 14:23 & Matthew 6:6. "(Q)uality Time" Time is probably our most precious commodity. How I wish I could simply go buy some more time with my now deceased father. I also wish the time we had together was of greater quality. The phrase Quality Time has been around since at least the 70s and has been steadily gaining popularity. Today, Quality Time is a frequently cited term found in many business, leadership, and relationship articles aimed at teaching people how to make their time more productive and meaningful. The definitions vary slightly but share a similar theme. Quality Time is the time we invest our full, focused and uninterrupted attention in a person or a task. While the catchphrase is relatively new, examples of people engaging in quality time date back to biblical times. Jesus would depart from his disciples, sometimes for days, to allow for fully focused, uninterrupted prayer with his Father. However, we don't necessarily need to invest days at a time to make it qualify as Quality Time. It may only take seconds of giving someone your full attention to make a positive impact. But what's important is that you don't create your own interruptions with things like a smartphone, a television show or anything else that will tempt you to temporarily check out. So I challenge you to set aside some time today to give someone a moment of Quality Time.

January 16. Read Proverbs 18:2, Romans 12:15 & Proverbs 4:7. "(U)nderstanding". “He doesn’t understand me.” “She just doesn’t get it.” How many times have we heard or thought similar phrases? And how many times have we used them as reasons to end a relationship? Showing understanding is not about right answers, solutions, opinions, advice, pity or pride. It is simply about acknowledging the feelings and emotions tied to a situation. When done correctly, understanding can become a powerful relational asset. The fastest route to understanding another’s situation is by putting yourself in their shoes. I feel that the best way to follow the second most important commandment—loving your neighbor as yourself—is to think about walking in their shoes. When you do that, the love comes naturally. Think about how you would feel in a similar circumstance. Then imagine what kind of emotions could go along with it. For example, when I see that someone is noticeably saddened by a bad medical diagnosis, I think about the feelings of fear, regret, pain and sorrow that can go along with it. I remember how sad I felt when we learned our 5-year-old son may have to miss out on a large portion of his childhood while battling a disease that was disintegrating his hip bone. This understanding process helps me to caringly communicate, “I’m sorry to hear about your trial. It can be very sad when we get news like this.” On a positive note, showing understanding works for celebration too! When I see someone is enthusiastic about an accomplishment, I think about the feelings of achievement, perseverance and satisfaction. This then allows me to imagine the emotions of joy they must be feeling. I can excitedly reply something like, “That’s awesome! Congratulations! I bet you feel great about that!” So I challenge you to make a conscious effort today to put yourself in the shoes of 3 people who are in the midst of a challenging or exciting situation and show them your understanding.

January 17. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 & Romans 12:6-8. "(I)nvest" It makes sense that gardens, grades, or retirement funds, need continual investments to grow and flourish. But many times we neglect to take this approach with our relationships. We usually put in a lot of time, effort and other resources in the beginning, but then we tend to go on autopilot and think that everything will take care of itself—we stop investing in our relationships. The first relationship we need to be concerned with is the one with God. I try to start and end my day with a YouVersion Bible plan so that God is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing I think about before I fall asleep. I also try to think about and apply our pastor’s message throughout the week. I’m far from perfect in my attempts, but I still make it a priority in my life. Next, we can use our God-given talents and abilities to serve and invest in others. We can give others our time, effort, treasure, knowledge and skill to name a few. And, to keep our relationships with others flourishing, we need to continually pour them in. In order to bring our absolute best into our relationships, we also need to invest in ourselves and make our health a priority. Diet and exercise are crucial for our mood, energy, resilience and endurance. So the healthier we are, the greater the potential for healthy relationships as we can do more. Sometimes the first step on the road to health is eliminating unhealthy habits and addictions. We all have areas to work on and we all know in our hearts what they are. So if you can’t change them on your own, I encourage you to get some help. The detox process might lead to a new healthy relationship! I challenge you to find an alternative for an unhealthy food choice today, start an appropriate exercise program, and invest one of your God-given resources into a relationship you normally wouldn’t invest in.

January 18. Read Luke 8:45-46 & Matthew 17:6-7 "(P)hysical Touch" Infants who are touched gently on a regular basis gain weight and grow faster than babies without such contact. Being touched by another person can trigger a cascade of chemical responses in our bodies that relieve stress and pain; create feelings of security and happiness; develop healthy relationships; enhance the immune system; decrease blood pressure; and improve blood sugar levels. Newborns denied physical touch have higher mortality rates even when they are provided with adequate food, clothing and shelter. We need physical touch to thrive. We can high-five and handshake at work. We can never give out too many hugs and kisses to our loved ones at home. My wife loves it when I hold her hand or put my arm around her. Words can't describe the joy I feel when my children hug me. These simple acts can be so uplifting. So I challenge you to give out 5 hugs to loved ones and 5 handshakes at the office this week to people that you normally wouldn't give them to.

Adapted from: www.relationshipresonance.com and Doug Hacking