

HOW TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS

We are now in the full throes of Christmastime. Excitement is in the air, people are driving a little too fast to get that last minute shopping done or make it to that out of the way restaurant for the yuletide office party. For those soon to be travelling out of town, the cars are being serviced or airfare has been purchased. For those waiting to receive folks from out of town, the house is being cleaned and decorated.

For many, anxiousness is aroused at the mere thought of seeing loved ones and friends that you haven't seen for quite some time. Although it is not often discussed, for many there is a dread at seeing loved ones and friends whose fellowship in time past has been toxic. You cannot get out of seeing these people and you dare not suggest that you not see them lest you offend the rest of the family as well as the person or people that are coming to mind even as you read these words. So the question arises, "What shall I do?" We all know what you must do...you must (at least temporarily) visit with this person or people. In light of the fact that you must see these people, how can you get along? Before we go any further, if you are a Christian, be aware...you can do this! *"I can (that means you) do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). Abraham pled with his nephew Lot after fighting had broken out among their ranks: *"And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren"* (Genesis 13:8). Before we see our loved ones that we have had a difficult time getting along with, we should remind ourselves, we are family! Cain refused to get along with his brother and after he had committed a murderous deed, asked of the Lord, *"...Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Genesis 4:9). We are our brother's keeper! And one way we do this is by keeping peace in our families and our extended families. *"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous"* (1 John 3:11, 12). Be determined to do the right thing whether anyone else does or not.

1. Don't pick a fight.

You know the "hot buttons." You know those subjects or even words that will irritate people. Don't push their buttons! You don't have to go there. There are enough other subjects to discuss. Just because you are well versed in a matter doesn't mean that you must bring it up. *"Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding"* (Proverbs 17:28). There is an old saying that is worth repeating, "Better to remain quiet and be thought of as a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23). *"Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him"* (Proverbs 29:20). *"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise"* (Proverbs 10:19). The Bible speaks that the fear of the Lord is the beginning place of wisdom and knowledge (Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10). Ecclesiastes 5:2 points out that choosing not to be quick to voice our opinion is walking in the fear of the Lord, *"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."*

Often times the "hot buttons" pertain to matters that do not or should not involve us. *"He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears"* (Proverbs 26:17). Once you grab an irritated dog by the ears, there is no letting go without getting bit. Far too often we asked for it when someone attacks us after we have picked a fight.. *"He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit"* (Proverbs 17:27).

2. Don't fight back.

After all of Job's friends gave their unwise words, God inquired, *"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"* (Job 38:2). Our rebuttals when words are spoken against have a greater tendency to create heat rather than shed light on a subject. We should keep in mind that God has given us two ears and one mouth, therefore let us be twice as likely to listen rather than talk. *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"* (James 1:19, 20). Keep in mind, there is nothing righteous that is going to come from the mind and mouth of someone who has

lost his temper. Instead of counting to ten to overcome your temptation to respond angrily, pray this prayer: *"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips"* (Psalm 141:3).

Someone must act like Jesus; why not let it be you? Our Lord said, *"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, **turn** to him the other also"* (Matthew 5:39). Jesus went on to say, *"...bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven..."* (Matthew 5:44b; 45a). This attitude and way of responding is the opposite response to human nature and the fallen culture in which we live. When we start fighting back, we are not merely responding, but we are like a run-away bullet in a canyon--we are ricocheting from wall-to-wall until finally the verbal bullet we shot comes back to hit us.

3. Be loving.

Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:34, 35). Love liberates; hatred incarcerates. *"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* (I John 2:9-11). Love gives light and blesses. Hatred gives darkness and blinds. Love is a decision! Make the right decision this Christmas!

4. Speak healing words.

Proverbs 16:24: *"Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."* Proverbs 12:18: *"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health."* Proverbs 15:1: *"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."* Proverbs 31:26: *"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness."* Proverbs 25:11: *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."*

I have never regretted what I did not say in anger. Sadly, I have regretted what I did say when I gave "a piece of my mind." I would highly suggest we

"keep all our mind"; we don't need to be giving any of it away. Sometimes the best way to keep our mind is to speak the healing words that help, not hurting words that hinder. Make this a much merrier Christmas by getting along with your family. With God's help and the love of Jesus you can overcome and become a blessing, not a burden to your family. For those who don't know Christ, you can become a greater witness by excelling in this area.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.