

Psalm 39:12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord... for I am a stranger with You..."

Servants that Affirm and Accept

Respect - defines the existence of any relationship built God's way ó shown by listening

Honesty ó defines the depth of any relationship ó shown by speaking (truth in love)

Commitment ó defines the length of any relationship ó shown by serving

Acceptance ó defines the enjoyment of any relationship ó shown by embracing

A "best friend" is someone who knows you really, really well and still likes you anyway!

Because of our sin-filled, shame-filled natures, we try to lift ourselves up by putting others down.

We are messed up people who mess up relationships with others without really trying. We compare ourselves to some, try to impress others and avoid still others. We *clearly* see the faults in others (Matt 7:3-5) and tend to focus on their need to change, instead of our responsibility to love them.

While we are commanded to confront, not accept, sinful behavior (Matt 18); we must also admit that we are all people in process and none of us have arrived at perfection. (Gal 6:1-2)

One of the most incredible truths I discovered as a new believer is found in Eph 1:6. I am óaccepted in the Beloved One.ö God, because of my position in Christ, accepts me, and therefore I am required to accept other believers in the body of Christ. God has made us with unique personalities and gifts. (1 Cor 12:1-13.) We have different strengths, weaknesses, points of view and personal convictions. (Rom 14:1-15:7) We come from different cultures and different colleges. Some of us are young, and all of us are getting older! But we are also painfully aware that getting old does not guarantee growing up! Accepting each other with grace and patience, longsuffering and affirmation is a mark of true spiritual maturity.

God calls us to look for ways to edify and encourage each other. Ephesians 4:29 and Phil 2:2-4. The apostles frequently encouraged believers to embrace each other with a ókiss of loveö or a óholy kissö. This was a huge challenge considering the Jew-Gentile division and long standing animosity between them. But acceptance is essential and the embrace commanded as evidence. Romans 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Peter 5:15. (With all the divisions in the Corinthian church acceptance was sorely lacking. It is interesting that Paul commands it in *both letters* to this church.)

I am not suggesting everyone needs to get óhuggyö, (much to the relief of us ónortherners!ö) but acceptance is non-negotiable and needs to be expressed in word and deed. It is the clear evidence of our mutual love for each other that Christ said would be the hallmark of His followers. (John 13:35) Make it a point to *demonstrate* mutual love and acceptance in Christ within your team this week.

Further passages to reflect on: Romans 14:1- 15:7 Why not pick a verse to memorize this week?