



Relationship Foundations

**Setting a firm foundation to
grow up relationships for life**

an eBook by
Kathryn C. Lang

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Relationships – Building Foundations

**Relationships – Building Foundations – One
Be Genuine**

I have had a great deal of alone time with my older sons – driving to and from adventures. The time has been even more precious because they are spending most of the summer away working and then they will be off to college before I know it.

We were in the car together for hours and I'm not big on listening to the radio while I drive. I enjoy the sound of the wheels on pavement – it makes room for the imagination to roam or the conversations to flow – I have mentioned before that I am not normal, right?

For our adventures, it was a little imagination and a lot of conversation. We talked about random stuff – including very detailed descriptions about the actors that would be featured in the live adaptation of the Road to El Dorado. We talked about budgets and how to manage the funds they would be earning over the summer. We shared stories about life and the things that happen where you are wandering through it. We argued – because that's what happens when you trap two hard headed individuals in the car for hours – my middle son constantly called a truce. And we laughed – a LOT!

Turning out the radio and tuning into each other made a way for us to invest in each other. If I want to develop lasting relationship then I have to be willing to make those kinds of investments on a consistent basis.

I need to lay a solid foundation on which I can build the relationships. The foundation begins with five choices:

1. Choose to be real – to reveal the me that is uniquely designed and not all that normal.
2. Choose to be vulnerable – allowing the openness to make way for connections.
3. Choose to be sincere in the words I use and the actions I take.
4. Choose to be quiet and speak with a soft voice (or say nothing at all if there is nothing nice to say).
5. Choose to be positive and find the possibilities in all that I meet.

It starts with the real me.

That time that I spent with my sons in the car – that was the real me. It was not a mom trying to be cool for her sons. It was not a mom trying to present an image that would make the sons think more highly of her. It was just me begin me – bad puns, snark, and all.

I have learned that is one of the most important things I can do with my sons is to be that genuine me with them. I want them to see who I really am so that they can feel confident in showing me who they really are. When I put on airs with them or with anyone then I put air between me and them. I cause there to be a distance that limits the ability to grow relationships.

My dad and I spend hours sitting on the back porch sharing, laughing, just talking – and it is because he invested many hours being real and genuine with me. That is what I am investing in with my sons. I know that when I follow the Be Attitudes of Relationship Foundations then the ones that I build will stand the test of time.

My Be Attitudes for Relationships

1. Be genuine – take the Popeye stand in life and declare “I am who I am.” I am a positive person. I do believe in rainbows. I stand bold in that place that is uniquely me.
2. Be open – dare to step into a position where you can get hurt because those are the places that give roots to relationships.
3. Be honest – play with an open hand and let others see what you are holding. Expect some negatives but refuse to become one because of them.
4. Be considerate – be aware of how things reflect on self and on others and proceed with cautious optimism.
5. Be willing – investment is required to grow relationships but it will also take away from the limited resources I have.

Everything that I do – that is worth doing or that provides lasting results – had its roots in relationships. The business I try to build, the worlds that I seek to share, and even the courses I want to teach (or take) – the all have been and will be affected by the relationships in and around my life.

We were designed to be in relationships. We have a need and a desire to connect with others – but also to grow those connections into something deeper. This is the foundation to what we grow up in our lives and for our lives.

These Be Attitudes for Relationships are not new – although I do give my unique twist. They are not secrets – although some days I think people are trying to pretend they don’t exist. They are simple ideas that can make something as complicated as a relationship a little easier to grow.

I may be designed for relationships – but that does not always mean I put my best foot forward when it comes to forging those relationships. I fall back into my “put on the best face” conditioning that I received from my Southern Belle grandmother. Even though I have studied about the value of relationships and I know that the way to grow up relationships has not changed in the last several centuries – despite the changes in technology – I still find myself there at times.

My son has been bringing friends over a lot lately – sometimes without any notice what so ever. They are just all of a sudden HERE. I found myself trying to be a little more or do a little more because that is what I’m supposed to do. I am supposed to entertain or play hostess. That southern upbringing that valued the importance of appearances just kicks right in.

The more they have showed up and the longer they have stayed the less that valued importance kicks in. I have started to relax enough to be as natural around them as I am around my own sons. They are beginning to encounter the real me – the genuine article – uncut and unedited (at least as unedited as I prefer to show up).

The important thing is that I have stepped up my game – or would that be stepped away from the game. I stopped putting on airs and in doing so I have made it possible for them to cross through that air that I had built up between us.

When I stop being something that I am not really then I begin to create a path for genuine relationships to grow.

1. I have to choose to be real. The other day some friends stopped in for a visit and in the middle of the visit my phone rang. I noticed them both grinning and whispering while I was on the phone and when I hung up I asked them about it. “You have a phone voice.”

I began to notice that not only did I have a phone voice, but I also had an “in public” voice. I began to take purposeful actions to limit those appearances and instead to take a bold step into the real and authentic me. That means I sometimes say “y/all.” That means that I sometimes make jokes in what others consider serious situations. That means that I pray in public and around people that barely know me.

People know what to expect from me – at least as much as I know what to expect from me because I am practicing the be attitude for relationships that says I need to be real.

2. Be open – reveal the nerves and expose the heart. Try not to hold back the essence of who you are. My son likes to walk barefoot in the summer, and on most of our property there is a sandy cushion that gifts a soft layer for his feet to land. There are also patches of briar grass – prickly buds that make frolicking through the grass an unpleasant experience.

He still walks barefoot around the property. He says he enjoys the feel of the sand under his feet and it is worth the risk of encountering the few patches of briar grass.

I need to be exposed despite the negatives that I will likely encounter because it is only when I am open that I can truly experience the comfort of relationships.

3. Be honest – tell the truth about everything to everyone. You don’t have to worry about remembering your stories if you simply tell the truth from the beginning. Besides, people always have way of finding the truth – especially if we have invested in covering it up.

Play with an open hand. Tell people when others are paying for your endorsement. Tell people when you have struggled in your triumphs or just struggled to get out of the mess you made in your journey. This does not mean that you have to tell all that you have done to everyone you encounter, it just means that you should make an attempt to be upfront from the beginning.

Trust is built on truth and trust is vital to any foundation for relationships.

4. *Be considerate* – it is important to think about how what I say or do will impact others or reflect upon their journey. We live in a world where the “I” is the most important. I require. I demand. I need. It doesn’t matter what might crumble around the actions or attitudes of “I.”

Just because it seems like a good idea does not mean that it is a good idea. Just because it is possible does not mean that it should be permissible. Just because I can does NOT mean I should.

A foundation for relationships is set when I make the choice to think of others before I take the action that will affect others.

5. *Be willing* – because until I am willing to invest I will never be in a position to grow relationships. Nothing worth having happens overnight – it will take time, effort, and resources and it is up to me to step out and invest.

Setting a foundation for relationships is about making the way for a connection to set roots and grow up into something strong and lasting. It is about revealing me so that I can encounter the real you.

Foundations for Being Genuine

Many years ago I watched a great film that included the song “Rainbow Connection” sung by that great, green actor Kermit the Frog. He is dreaming about something more and he knows that there are others out there that dream of something more. That is what the song is sharing – the hope of possibilities.

I do not know Kermit the Frog, but I can feel a connection to that dream when I hear the song. I believe in the possibilities and I embrace the idea that others dream as well. When I meet those others and begin to invest in knowing them and allowing them to know me then I take that rainbow connection and create something solid.

Jesus stressed the importance of relationships – first with God and then with man – and the story is featured in three of the four gospels – in Luke 10, Matthew 22, and Mark 12 Jesus is confronted by the lawyers of the time and asked to give the most important commandment.

Jesus answers with love – first love God with all that you are and all that you have and then love others through this love of God. Jesus goes on to say that on these two things everything else rests.

When I take the time to invest in relationships and to grow up this type of love (a love that puts others before self) then I will have the foundation for solid relationships – relationships that not only strengthen me but last beyond the normal explanations of the world –because the relationships will not be founded in the limitations of the world but in agape.

Paul talks about how to set a foundation for relationships in Galatians 5 when he reminds us that we are not called to just be free – although we have been made free through the love choices of Christ. This freedom is set before us so that we have the way and the focus to serve others – it is not about self but about love and through that love it is about service.

James warns of what happens when relationships are not fostered. James 3:16 holds this warning (according to the King James translation) “Fore where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” When I give the “I” the control then every begins to crumble around the “me.” James goes on to provide hope in verse 17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

This is how I live a genuine life in nut shell – I keep my focus on the wisdom from above.

Relationship Foundations – Two Be Open

I seek out rainbows. I seek out hope. I seek out adventure into places not known before. There is something amazing about stepping into a place that I never knew before.

I had a magical place that I discovered when I was a teenager. I would drive up to a local waterfall hangout during the fall and spring – before others made their way to the spot to enjoy the falls and the fun of jumping from the cliffs into the pools below. I would hike the hills and climb around on the rocks.

One day I made my way along a cliff side and then pushed through some shrubs. I stepped out on to a rock that was fluffy – or it felt fluffy because the mist from the falls had allowed a thick bed of moss to cover the rock. I sat down on that moss and lost myself in the rainbows that danced on the mist.

Because I was willing to venture into a place that I had never been I discovered a hideaway that became a well of renewal for me all through high school. I visited when my grandfather died. I visited when I had my heart broken. I visited when I lost a good friend to a drunken driving accident.

It helped me find my hope – that moss covered rock and those dancing rainbows.

I have always been up for an adventure – because I learned early on that some of the best things are discovered when I step into the unknown and allow myself to experience new or different.

I choose my college in part because it was as far as I could go from my childhood home without leaving the state and paying out of state tuition. I jumped into the new experience with both feet – meeting people from all over the globe and getting to know them and their unique customs.

I have always been up for meeting new people and encounter their new ideas or unique way of thinking – as long as they did not try to force me to accept those ideas as my own. I attended

church with a friend – in part because different denominations and services have always fascinated me but mostly because it was revival and she received points for each guest she brought. I enjoyed the service until the end when I was told that I had to “walk the aisle” if I wanted to be saved. I understood what they were saying, but I couldn’t get them to understand that I had a personal relationship with Christ even though I had never officially walked the aisle according to their custom.

I want to experience more and learn more but I want to be allowed to then take that knowledge and understand it for myself. This sense of intrigue, or interest, or adventure – however you want to label it – it has made it possible for me to be open to the new and the unexpected despite the negatives I have encountered in my life.

I have been stalked – but I still am open to trusting people.
I have been bullied – but I still am open to growing new friendships.
I have been lied to – but I still am open to believing.

The best relationship foundations occur when I am willing to be open about my journey and to what lies along the path.

I need to be open to new opinions and ideas. It turns out that no everyone believes the same things I believe.

I need to be open to a variety of tastes. Variety is not only the spice of life but it is also the key to balanced health.

I need to be open to different directions. The more I learn the more I realize that there is more than one way to get there.

I need to be open to unexpected experiences. Even if I stayed closed then I would still encounter unexpected – so why not be open and willing to experience it.

I need to be open to unique interpretations. Every eye will see the image with a different perspective because every eye is unique.

I moved all the chairs from around the dining room table even though I loved the chairs that I had around the dining room table. I tried them in a different location and put some new chairs around the table. I was open to the possibility that the new chairs would work better at the table and the old chairs would work better elsewhere. I ended up moving everything back the next day – but I learned something from my openness about how I want to use the spaces in our home.

That is what being open does – it creates the opportunity for learning and learning allows for growing and it is in the growth that I begin developing the relationship foundations that will keep me focused on the path I ahead.

A few years back, I determined that I would take a green smoothie challenge that would last four weeks – four weeks of almost all raw foods. I'm still not sure what prompted my desire to take the challenge because I have never been much of a smoothie or raw person – but I jumped in.

I tried to follow all of the recipes and ended up using my main dish as a side dish for my family meals. I discovered that I enjoyed the flavor of raw garlic more than I would have imagined possible. I ate raw zucchini and I had probably only had it once or twice in my whole life up until then.

I was open to the green smoothie challenge and because I was open I was in a position to experience new things that I would have never experienced otherwise.

I have to be open – not just in what I do but in who I encounter. When I choose to be open then I get into a position to experience new things, new people, and new possibilities.

I need to be open to new opinions and ideas. I don't have to agree with them but when I choose to be open then I can learn from them. I attended a church with a friend while I was in college. The customs in the church were new to me. I didn't think I agreed with them but I wasn't sure why. I spent the next few days researching the customs in Scripture so that I could understand my feelings. I didn't try to fix the church – I was just open to the experience and then found a way to learn from that experience.

That is how being open should work.

I need to be open to a variety of tastes – tastes in music, tastes in entertainment, and tastes in food. The new experiences do not have to be my favorite, but I learn and grow just by making the choice to experience. I had the chance to attend an event with a friend that was being hosted by someone from another country. We sat down to dinner and I knew the plate held food, but I had no idea what it was or what it was made up of. "Try it first" my friend requested. I tried it and I liked it. It was nothing too eccentric – but if I had asked first then I would probably have moved it around on the plate instead of actually trying it.

Being open helps me to try out things I might have otherwise passed by.

I need to be open to different directions. The way I get there and the way you get there may not be the same and both may offer something worth experiencing. I was driving to an event that I had attended for over ten years. This year there was an accident on the main interstate so my husband and I decided to take a smaller highway. It twisted and turned around some amazing scenery – places that I had never encountered despite having lived just a few hours away for all of my life. The different direction revealed some hidden jewels that only the new direction could show me.

Being open allows me to discover things only visible from the new direction.

I need to be open to unexpected experiences. Life is FULL of unexpected and if I am open to them then they will feed me instead of holding me down or pushing me back. I set out on a visit

to a friend in Florida – only half way there the car started smoking. I had a two day layover but used that time to learn about the city where I was. I discovered some interesting shops, some fun dining establishments, and invested the rest of the time sunning by the pool of the hotel while reading. I was open to making the most of the unexpected and so I got something out of it instead of having wasted time for my efforts.

Being open is often about making the most of the moment.

I need to be open to unique interpretations. Not everyone thinks like I think and when I am open to their unique way of thinking I may just discover something I would have missed. My son was explaining something to me the other day and I knew that what he was saying was wrong – but then I stopped myself from thinking that way. Instead I recognized that it wasn't a matter of right or wrong. I was a matter of listening to something that he considered important. His insights – although ridiculous on the surface, did have something of value stirring underneath. I only discovered the hidden currents when I let myself be open to what my son had to share.

Being open allows me to see with the eyes of another person – at least for a moment.

I need to be willing if I want to experience more. I need to be adventurous if I want to experience life outside the box. I need to be open if I want to lay a foundation for relationships – because each person that I engage will be unique from the next. Without openness I will always struggle to build relationships in my life.

Foundations for Being Open

I am willing to try new things – sometimes just to see what happens. In 2005, we built up a show garden that covered almost two acres. In the spring of 2006, when it came time for the first weeding, I suggested lighting a match and setting fire to the beds. It was the same process we had used on the vegetable garden before we turned it each year. Although other garden experts have since told me that it is a bad thing, I found that in our garden it worked just fine. Sometimes you just have to try.

My favorite phrase in all the world is “we’ve never done it that way before.” NOT! We attended a church at one time that wanted to grow up and change and affect the world. I asked once what they were willing to change – because wanting change and being willing to change are two different things. One of the elders explained they were willing to change anything as long as it wasn't something they liked.

They didn't want to change –they want to have the results of change set upon them without having to invest the effort. They wanted to have the benefits of change without having to step into the unknown or encounter the unexpected.

Solomon spoke of the importance of being open in Proverbs 18:13. He warns that if you answer something before hearing then it is on you – it is your folly and even shame. I have to take the time to be open to what others have to say about something before I can understand something –

and the truth is that even after I hear I will never fully understand – not where they are coming from and not what lies deep in their hearts.

The key to following what Solomon teaches is to always filter the hearing through the Word and the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 7 Jesus is teaching His disciples about finding the Way and following the Way. He tells them to seek, and to ask, and to knock. He is encouraging them to move in a direction outside of the ordinary and expected – a direction where they have “never done it that way before.”

He puts a warning on the understanding of being open in Matthew 7:15 (according to the King James translation) “Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” In other words, listen to others but do not simply believe them. Jesus goes on to explain that we will be able to tell the truth by the fruit that others bare.

I have yet to agree with every word that every preacher has preached. Some of the great evangelists and I have a different understanding of some Scripture but I listen to their teaching because they DO see things different. I am open to what they have to say and I take notes from what they say and then I invest in sifting through those notes during my prayer and study time.

I am open – but I heed the warning from Jesus and look for the fruits.

John says it more plainly in 1 John 4 when he tells us not to trust every one. He states that there are many false prophets out there. John says that we are to test the spirits – to test the teaching – hold it up to the Word for ourselves so that we can see if it is from God and if it’s not from God then there is only one other place from which it can come.

I understand – a little anyway – why some are fearful of change and trying new things and being open. When others take advantage or hurt me, then I struggle to step out in confidence again – to be open to the next encounter because of the past hurt.

I have to find a way to let it go – to let go of the past and to see beyond the hurts so that I can encounter the possibilities and blessings of God.

Relationship Foundations – Three Be Honest

Sparkles are good. Just thinking about sharing sparkles makes me happy – especially when I picture sharing them with my friend, Bo Williams, who is the one that started the whole rainbows and lollipops host thing – by accident I think. I am pretty sure he did not intend for me to latch on to it the way I have.

I find joy in little things like that and that joy makes me smile and that smile spread when it encounters others. I get all warm and fuzzy when I know that an encounter with me left someone smiling – or even better left them laughing.

Over the years I have found that I can have those encounters more when I am honest with others – when I step up and step out into a place where I expose my heart.

Growing up, my mom complained that I brought home every stray in the neighborhood. I told her they just followed me home, but she knew that I was petting the strays and calling them to follow me. She told me that was one thing I never grew out of – bringing home strays. As I grew up they became the two-footed variety, but I was always putting my heart on my sleeve and trying to help others.

And then someone stomped on my heart in a harsh way that took me years to get beyond. I became cautious about who I would share with and what I would share. I put up a wall and pretended that behind that wall everything was okay.

It didn't help much that when I would venture out from behind that wall. It seemed there was always someone there to attack my heart again. It was almost as if the world was out to get me – and in a way the world is out to get me. The world is trying to keep me from doing what I am designed to do – and the world knows that I will never accomplish all that I am supposed to be if I am hiding behind a wall.

I have to step out and reveal my heart if I want to create a foundation for lasting relationships. It is scarier to know that others may try to hurt me – initially and unintentionally, but exposing my heart makes all of the difference in where this will go.

When I am investing in relationship foundations, there are some things that I need to be focused on when it comes to being honest.

1. Tell the truth – not half-truths, not almost truths, and not white lies. Tell the truth.
2. Be just – stand firm on your moral foundation so that others know what to expect when approaching you about a situation or event.
3. Act with fairness – in dealings and actions. Honor your word and follow through on your promises and don't try to cheat.
4. Choose authenticity – treat everyone as equal from the janitor to the CEO and from the guru to the fan – air on the side of impartiality.
5. Lay it on the line – reveal your expectations, your wants, your investment concerns or desires. Be willing to put it out there even with the possibility of getting hurt.

I was told something recently by someone I trusted and then that person did not follow through on what was said. I struggled between believing in their honesty or clamming up because of their deception.

I also struggled to believe all of the people the one person had brought into my life because if the original person deceived me then how can I trust the others?

For me, this can be the toughest part about approaching live in a place of honest – the reactions and attitudes of others make me question my honest journey. They hurt me and if I keep being honest then they will continue to hurt me.

I want to crawl back behind my wall to protect my heart from that hurt – but a heart that is protected and shielded from others will only begin to wither. The heart needs the relationships to flourish and the relationships can only be built on a foundation that is covered with honesty.

When I am hurt by others and I react by withdrawing from the rest – then I allow those others to have control over my life. I give up on becoming what I am designed to be. I fall into a hole that they dug when they hurt me in the first place.

I have to be honest. And my place of honest can never be based on your place of honest. It has to be about me and about what I am doing and where I am going because I am the only one that I can control.

The word honest come from the word honor – and when I choose to be honest I honor myself and I honor the ones that I am engaging. THAT is why the action of being honest is such a valuable component for relationship foundations.

The first time I was honest with someone – I mean the vulnerable, "I trust you with it all" kind of honest - he used it against me and I mean LITERALLY in a court of law. That is enough to make you reconsider the honest path.

I overcame that hurt, but I learned that this kind of honest journey was not for the faint of heart. I also learned that the depth of honest runs deeper in relationships that have grown up and have been tested.

I need to also be honest in the new relationships, but this is a foundational honest that gives the relationship a place to begin to grow up. There are a few points that I always need to utilize when I am working on that relationship foundation.

1. I always need to tell the truth. This does not mean I have to tell all, but it does mean that people should trust what I say – ALWAYS. One of the places this has become the biggest challenge – at least in today’s society – is in the answer to invitations. Too often people respond automatically and not authentically. “Are you coming?” “We are going to try.”

Now this would be okay – although not the greatest answer – if there was a genuine intention of trying. Most of the time this is a “polite” way of saying that we are not coming. If you have no intention of attending then just say “no thank you.” That is the better answer. You don’t have to give a reason, but do tell the truth.

As trivial as this sounds, an automated response that is misleading will begin to discount the word of the one giving it. I have to speak in truth and THE truth in all things big, small, and in between.

2. *I have to be just in my actions and my behaviors.* I had a friend call me to get me to talk to a mutual friend. She wanted me to convince the friend that the road currently on would not lead to good places. “She already knows what I believe, which is why she hasn’t called.” The mutual friend knew where I stood about certain things and because of that stance she knew what I would say (and it turns out that when we know people will disagree with our direction we don’t tend to go to them to borrow a map). My solid moral compass makes it easy for people to know what to expect from me in most situations and circumstances.

3. *I have to be fair in my dealings.* My husband and I worked together in a landscaping business for several summers. One year we put a bid on a new construction. We wrote out what we would do and when we could have it completed. Because of unforeseen circumstances, we invested more hours on the job than we had anticipated. We could have put that additional expense on the home owner but we chose to honor our agreement. Because we honored our agreement and were fair in our dealings, the owner offered us several more landscaping jobs – at the higher price.

I committed to doing a task that I had no real interest in doing but that would help out a friend. I put off completing the task because I had other, more pressing things to do (how many times can you watch Dr. Who all the way through before you have to admit there is a problem). I almost called my friend to tell her I just couldn’t do it but I remembered that I had given my word and I made purposeful choices that allowed me to honor my word.

When I am fair in dealings and in behaviors then I make way for trust to grow.

4. *I need to choose to be authentic.* This shows up in the way I treat others. If I treat a guy as less because he dresses different or drives an older car, then I make a way for people to trust my honesty in other areas.

I heard a story about a man looking to help someone in need. He approached a guy at a gas station who wore torn clothes and drove a beat up truck. He offered the worn out man money. The worn out man turned it down. The man went back to his car and watched for a while certain he needed to help the worn out man. As the man watched, the worn out man finished pumping his gas, got into his beat up truck, and drove across the street to a private airport.

Appearances are not the end all and be all – that is WHY you can’t judge a book by its cover. When I choose to be authentic that I choose to open up the book and read.

5. *I have to be willing to lay it on the line.* I have to be willing to reveal my expectations, my desires, and my heart. I have to be willing to do this despite knowing that sometimes I will get hurt. I have to do this even though the others may not do it in return. This process of laying it on the line is about building my relationship foundations because it prepares my heart for real and lasting connections.

Relationships can be tough, but if I investing in a foundation that is covered with honest words and honest actions then relationships become a little easier to grow.

Foundations to Be Honest

How I speak and then how I act to back up the talk – that shows others what they can expect from me. If they trust my words because my actions follow through then I build a foundation where I can grow up a relationship.

Words matter in so many ways – but we tend to throw them around like they have no meaning or value.

Not long ago I was invited to an event that I did NOT want to attend. I prayed for anything to come up so that I would not be obligated to attend. I am all about etiquette, but I never sent in an RSVP card because up until the last minute I hoped for an out.

I wanted to just say no when I received the invitation, but it was one of those events where I am expected because of my place or my position. It was a “have to go” moment.

I went, but my actions and attitude reflected on my lack of desire. I felt dishonest in my participation and I was definitely disingenuous.

Being in a place outside of honest is not a good place for those around me, but it is also not a good place for me. Not only can it cause me physical discomfort in the end, but when I live anywhere but in a place of honest then I have to invest resource remembering the stories I have told.

Mark Twain notably reminded us “tell the truth and you don’t have to remember anything.”

Being honest keeps me in balance and helps to keep my life in check – but it also brings me under the protection of my Father. In Psalm 37: 30 – 31 declares what God does in the lives of those that choose to walk out an honest life – focused on Him. According to the King James translation “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.”

When I searched the word righteous, it led to a Hebrew word that meant clear self. For me, that gives an image for being honest. The psalm also speaks of law and judgement – things that I always see as honest.

The Kathryn translation looks like this – when I make the choice to live upright, to have a clear conscious and a clear self when I focus what is moral and clean (no trace of deceit or treachery) then God is there making certain that none of my steps slip.

You get that, right. **NONE OF MY STEPS SLIP.**

That is huge for me, because I know there are days when I feel like all my steps are slipping and I am running uphill in sand. This Scripture reminds me that if I am in the right path – the honest path – then God keeps my steps from slipping.

I needed that confirmation for my journey. I needed that reminder that no matter how much another person tries to hurt me or tries to draw me in to a game of deceit, I need to continue in the honest path.

Proverbs 21:3 puts it like this – God is more concerned with me doing what is right and just than what I give in sacrifice. God is more focused on how I act and how I walk than what I put into the tithe plate. God is more interested in the reflection that I am than in the giving that I provide.

Why – because if I am not walking out a life that produces fruit of honesty then everything else comes from a heart NOT focused on God. God is more concerned about the heart than the flesh because when the heart gets right then the flesh comes around.

Relationship Foundations – Four Be Quiet

The extraordinary life should not be something unexpected – it should be not only expected but demanded. I should live an extraordinary life because that is what I am uniquely designed to do – I am designed to live MY extraordinary life. I am not designed to live in your limitations or rules. I am designed to live bold in my uniqueness.

That is key – to know me and my uniqueness so that I can walk out the extraordinary while encouraging you to walk out yours as well. We are not in competition against each other because we both have extraordinary lives we are called to live.

We do need each other to get there. We are not designed to do it alone and besides we are stronger when we are together (and the journey is way more fun when you have others to share it with).

I have been learning the strength of relationships over the last several years in a powerful way. I ran into a situation that required having support from others and I discovered quickly who I had relationships with and who were acquaintances in the same organization. The relationships stepped up and stood shoulder to shoulder with me despite the threat the situation posed for them. The acquaintances avoided making eye contact with me during the ordeal and even to this day.

Relationships feed me and grow me and empower me. I need more of that in my life if I am going to live out my impossible dreams! Although we want to encourage each other in this journey I also have to learn to balance my encouragement tendencies with my ability to be quiet.

I met with a new group of people – my summer mastermind group the other day and one of the participants encouraged us to speak up. I laughed out loud when he made the suggestion. It is almost dangerous to encourage me to speak up. Talking has never been a challenge for me. Being quiet – THAT has been my challenge.

I want to give my opinion not because you want my opinion but because I know the value of my opinion. I want to share my knowledge not because you want my knowledge but because you NEED my knowledge. It is that valuable.

It has taken training and lots of practice to get to a place where I am not compulsive with my words. I have learned to be quiet and there are many days when I have to purposefully choose to be quiet – because my natural tendency to share words usually wants to take the lead.

My tips for learning to be quiet:

Listen more – and focus on the words. Don't just hear but take a moment to comprehend. Look at the person talking and let those words setting into your mind.

Think first – take a moment to contemplate what you hear and the words you think need sharing. Take a breath, take a moment, take a break – before you let the words take off.

Write it down – in moments of emotions or high energy, write it first so you can give it more thought.

Wait for a request – for someone to ASK you for your thoughts or concerns. Before you give your words away, wait to be asked.

Speak softly – lower your voice and also soften your stance. Softer words draw people in instead of pushing them away.

Quiet is not my nature. I am the one that stood up to the administration in junior high school. I'm the one that shared her thoughts with the expert leader that didn't necessarily AGREE with the expert. I have LOTS of words.

I can talk – up a storm. My dad said that I didn't learn to talk until I was two but that I haven't stopped since then. For most of my life, that was true. If I heard silence for more than a moment then I felt it was my responsibility to fill that silence. And believe me – I COULD FILL IT.

I have learned that there is nothing wrong with the silence – unless you are a Dr. Who fan but that is a whole different story. The silence can be a good thing or a peaceful thing or even a strengthening thing. I have to learn to embrace the quiet if I want to make space for relationships in my life.

I have learned to listen to the sound of silence – the birds outside the window or the wheels on the pavement. I have learned to allow that time of silence to give my imaginations some running room. I have learned to let the silence build the comfortable air between me and others.

I have to lower my voice and even keep my mouth shut so that others can share their words or that we can simply connect in the moment of silence.

Having the gift of gab is a blessing in the eyes of some people. I can see why they would see it that way – because they struggle to talk with new people or in public situations. But the gift of gab is not always a blessing to those that have to endure it ALL DAY LONG.

I am only realizing how exhausting it can be when my youngest son began talking . . . and talking . . . and talking. I started to think that my dad may not have been fully joking about me not starting to talk until I was two and not shutting up since.

It can be even more challenging for the introverts out there. That many words in one encounter can make their heads almost explode.

It's not easy, but with plenty of practice I am learning to relish in the quiet and relax through the quiet.

1. I am learning to listen more – and not just listen more but to listen with intent. I am trying to hear what is being said – the deeper message that may hide within the words. This means I have to stop the voices in my head and let the words of others be what takes up the energy in my mind. I have to break the habit of thinking about how I will respond even before all the words have been shared.

Being quiet allows the other person to have the floor and it also shows that other person that I feel what is being said is important. Being quiet helps me to lay a foundation for relationships in my life.

2. I need to think before I speak. I need to weight the value of the words up against the cost of the words and then determine if the words should be shared. Sometimes my silence says more than any words I could put together.

Several years ago, my husband had a small angry fit in the bank when talking to a teller. After we were back in the car I began to explain to him how inappropriate his behavior had been. I felt the words “This is not your place” well up inside me and I knew it was the Holy Spirit because I had been reading about how not to try and be a parent to my spouse. So I stopped talking – I had to stop talking because if I would have said anything I would have gone back to that same situation and would have been talking about it again.

I come up on similar situations with my sons – my oldest son more often than the others. He is just as stubborn as his mom and when I say things then he says things back and before I know it we are caught up in a circle that serves only as a way to open the door for strife. There is no value in the circle. When I invest just a moment to think about the words then I realize that despite wanting to correct or guide, it is not worth the circle of strife that I know it will lead to.

Being quiet allows my heart to guide the words instead of leaving them in the hands of my emotions.

3. I do better when I take a moment to write it down. Jesus wrote down words in the sand before He spoke to the crowd. If Jesus took time to write it down then there is value to the action of writing it down.

I got mad not long ago – because someone attacked my son – not physically but verbally. I skipped over all things logical and dove right in to crazy mom syndrome. I have the power of the

blog so I invested the next several minutes pounding out a blog post. I was going to name names and shame those involved – ALL OF THEM.

I finished the post and then took a break to stretch. When I came back to edit the post, some of the anger had been lifted. By the time I finished the complete edit, I realized that a ranting mother did not mesh with a message of HOPE. And in truth, when I held up the issue to HOPE then the images that HOPE revealed changed my need to scream it from the roof tops.

Sometimes, the act of writing down what I think needs to be said can release the desire to release the words.

4. Wait for a request before you share. This type of quiet has been the hardest to learn, and I have had to retake the test a number of times before I could get to a place where I would do it right. I need to give opinions and explain how others are wrong. THEY need to know.

Because I did it so much growing up, my husband is still caught off guard when I don't offer my opinion on situations. "They didn't ask." I have explained to him on several occasions. He just shakes his head and mutters "never stopped you before."

He's right. In the past my opinion would be heard, but I am learning that if I choose to remain quiet often times – or maybe just sometimes – my opinion will be requested, and when requested the requester will be much more open to my words than if I had just thrown them at him.

Being quiet often prompts others to seek out my words.

5. I also need to speak softly. When I lower my voice I draw people closer to me so that they can hear me. Those that are leaning in will get more from the words than if I had shouted them out. When I get quiet, then I close the gap between you and me – because that is the only way to hear what I have to say.

Being quiet is a powerful way to set up a foundation for relationships.

Foundations to Be Considerate

It can be a challenge to be quiet – to hold my tongue if you will – even in normal, everyday conversation. Someone shares something and I need to add or to clarify – I mean I NEED to add or clarify. I know that the words that are fighting to get out will not help the situation, but they want so much to be free.

If the situation is one that is in conflict with me or my family – say for instance someone says something about one of my sons – well, the need to say something only intensifies. I want to defend my son or protect my son or just put the other person in his or her place.

Words are tricky little things with a GREAT DEAL of power. Once they are out in the world, they will have an effect on the people they encounter. It is up to me to insure that the words I

share provide hope and inspiration and not that the crush someone else under their weight. I can only do this when I guard the words by taking a moment to be quiet.

Quiet can be a powerful place to reside. In Exodus 14, God has sent the children of Israel out of Egypt and the Pharaoh decided he doesn't want them to go so he sends all of his men after the nation of Israel. They are trapped between the army that wants them dead or alive and the sea – a pretty serious rock and hard place kind of moment.

Moses stands before the people and tells them that they need to fear not – yes, there is an army and there is a sea, but do not fear. Stand still – don't run and don't panic. You will see the salvation of the Lord. There is no explanation about what is going on or how it will be resolved, only the words "be still" or to "stand fast."

Moses then goes on to say in verse 14 from this chapter "The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." – This is from the King James translation.

I don't know if you have ever been in a crowd, but it is a noisy place to be. Add in some chaos or a sprinkle of fear, and that noisy place becomes a roar. Here Moses is telling an entire nation to be quiet – God's got this.

I looked up the word peace, and the Hebrew word that is used in this verse means to be silent and even to be deaf – to not speak a word. Even when it seems that I am in an impossible situation, I need to be quiet, to block out the noise around me, and to focus on the truth that God's got this.

Proverbs has a lot to say about being quiet including Proverbs 17:28 which says that even a fool who doesn't speak will be considered wise. It reminds me of the old saying that it is better to keep your mouth shut and let people wonder if you are a fool than to open your mouth and prove them right.

Proverbs 29:11 references the need to control the worlds – this is from the NIV translation: "Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end."

I have to choose to be quiet – so that I can focus on my trust in God, so that I give others the chance to be heard, and so that I can guard against the ravaging tongue that can kill as well as heal if it is not reigned in.

Relationship Foundations – Five Be Positive

There has been a LOT of swirling of mess and noise and chaos. The news swirls, the whining swirls, the chaos swirls, and I sit there trying to concentrate on the eye of the storm instead of getting caught up in all of the swirling.

It all started with a phone call – because most of the time the swirling starts with somethings small and inconspicuous. I tried to return my focus to my work after the call ended, but my mind

continued to drift back to the conversation. I had to stop when I was supposed to be doing and try to reign in the swirling.

It helped to invest some time to get the swirling in order.

And then the email arrived. It was completely unrelated to the phone call, but it was another swirling mess that left me all the more dejected because of the swirling mess I had tempered earlier.

I tried to ignore the email, but it seems that once that swirling mess gets up in my thoughts it will not go away. I have to face it down or it will take complete control. I handled the email with a few words and then I hunkered down to focus on doing what I knew I needed to do.

It was then that I had to shift gears and run an errand that turned into twice as much driving and twice as much time as I had planned because something was misplaced. There only way to handle that swirling mess was to literally drive right through it – which took me through the chaos of Highway 431 which just happens to be one of the most dangers highways out there.

Such was my day.

I could have thrown in the towel at any point, and I considered it at more than one of them. I used each swirling encounter to accomplish a task and to feed my muse for future writing (like right now). It may not have looked like I had intended, but in the end I had check marks on my to-do list and I had a little less swirling going on.

I had to be intentional about finding the possibilities in all of that mess. I had to be purposeful in finding the positives. I stuck to the speed limit – despite the crazy driving going on around me – and I never had to deal with a red light. They were all green for my drive. THAT is a positive.

While searching through the information to deal with one mess I found some unexpected information I could use for something else. If I had not been looking, then that information would probably have stayed tucked away in the file folder never to see the light of day. THAT is a positive.

Sometimes all I have to go in to calm the swirling chaos is a focus on a positive. And when I choose to focus on the positive and the possibilities in all the situations as well as all the people I encounter then I invest in setting a solid foundation for growing up relationships.

Seeking out the positive and the possibilities takes practice.

1. See it from a different perspective. I need to choose to try and view the moment from the eyes of the other person. I know I am not them, but if I try to walk in their shoes then I may see something I would have missed.

2. Go from problem into a possibility. I may not be able to find a positive, but I can manage the problem, find a way around the problem, or maybe just push on through and create a possibility out of it.

3. Grasp hold of the little things. Even a little positive had the potential to bloom into something amazing.

4. Look beyond the storm. See that the sun is shining, or the tomorrow is on the way, or that you are not alone.

5. Refuse to go there – refuse to step into the mud, to become infected with PLOM disease, or to just get tangled up in the whine.

Life has plenty of swirling messes to toss my way and I can either get caught up in the mess or make habits that will lift me up and pull me out of the messes.

The person in front of me complained about something that happened to someone else that had been seen on the news a thousand miles away. The teller joined in and began to complain as well. At one point, they both looked at me as if expecting me to join in the complaint wheel.

I wanted to explain to them that I didn't have an opinion about the situation because it wasn't my situation and there was no way I could see all the angles of the story from where I was anyway. Instead, I smiled, nodded my head and gave them this challenge. "Can you name the band that sings this song?"

Sometimes the only positive you can find in the circumstances may not even be related to the circumstances – but if in choosing the positive I manage to move the focus then it will have done its job.

I live around some negative folks and there are days when I just want to crawl in the darkness with them. The wrong word or even the wrong look can plunge me into a negative rant – most of the time it is only in my head but the occasional rant has been known to escape.

It is my practice to reign in even the negative thoughts that try to take root in my mind. The more negatives there are around me, the more I have to be on guard to protect against the damage they can do.

The best way to combat the negatives is to make a habit of the positives.

1. See things different – or at least from a different perspective. Kids are a great example of seeing things from a different perspective. I took my son to his day camp and when I got out to go into the school a gentleman greeted me with a normal "Good morning" greeting. I responded in kind but added and how are you. He told me he was getting old. I smiled and said "you are only as old as you think you are."

His grandson was standing next to him and looked at me with the oddest expression. “He KNOWS how old he is.” The boy saw it different than I saw it.

This is only the most reason encounter, but kids seem to have a natural tendency to see things from a unique perspective. When I choose to see things different from how I see them now then I make a way for the positives and the possibilities to take root.

2. *Go from problem to possibility.* Instead of investing in complaining about something, I need to be about doing something. I may not be able to fix the something – but I can make changes either to myself or to my circumstances that will affect the something. I may not be in a position to overcome the something – but I can take steps to manage or limit the something.

My older sons and I went to pick up some furniture the other day and the tire on the trailer began to go flat. We had to stop and fill it up with a fix-a-flat material and then I had to drive home even slower than I would have even with a full trailer.

It was a problem I couldn’t fix. It was a problem I couldn’t get around. So I found a way to limit the damage by taking the extra time to engage with and enjoy the company of my sons.

3. *Grasp hold of the little things* – because little things add up to big differences. There are times when I can’t fix what is happening around . . . okay there are a LOT of times when I can’t fix it. There are even some times when I can’t do much about it. But I find a way to smile and that smile – that one little element of positive – helps me to get on through.

My grandmother died on my 17th birthday. She had been sick and suffering and it was time for her to go. I was at her house when it happened and I had just come out of her room. I remember telling her she could go on that I would be happy to share my birthday with her. Despite all the tears that followed her death, the one thought of sharing a birthday with her was the positive that got me through.

It may be a little positive, but even a little positive can help to get you through

4. *Look beyond the storm.* The storm may be big, but it is still limited. The storm may be high and it may be heavy, but the sun is still there, just waiting to break through. I have to be determined enough to see beyond the limitations of the storm.

I was out one day on the lake in my one man sail boat. It had been a great day until a storm blew up out of nowhere. The wind kicked up and sent me flipping over the side of the boat. I climbed back in and watched for a moment. That was when I noticed the sparkle of the sun just along the horizon. The storm wasn’t going to last forever.

5. *Refuse to go there.* Be determined not to get caught in the negative loop the world spins on. It is not always easy, but it is always a simple choice away.

The latest “that’s not fair” news story filled my social media feed. I read the first article. I read the second article and then I realized I was being sucked down into the loop. I started deleting all

the feeds that showed up with that story. I couldn't fix it anyway so I refused to invest any more of my resources into the story.

The sooner I refuse to go there the easier it will be for me to find the positive or the possibility in the moment.

There are a lot of negatives that I have to face in this world, but when I build up a habit of finding the positive and the possibility then I will be able to navigate my way through.

Foundations to Be Positive

Not everyone has a natural tendency towards being positive – and even those that have a natural leaning will hit chaotic swirls that cause that positive to come into question. It is during the tougher times when a habit of positive becomes so important. When I have made it a habit to always seek out the positive and search for the possibility then even when the going gets tough, I will keep on seeking.

My all-time favorite bible verse, and the one that I have deemed the family motto, expresses this understanding perfectly. Philippians 4:8 – according to the Lang translation – say that if it is not good, positive, uplifting, or encouraging then just let it go.

The King James translation says “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these.”

It is a simple concept – if I am invested in thinking on the good things then I will not be in a position to think on the negative things. That means that when I am actively seeking out the positive then even the storms lose their power in my life and over my life.

It is one thing to seek out the positive in a storm – it is another one altogether to speak that positive to the storm. My words are just as valuable as my focus – because my words hold life and they hold death. My words can give life to the positive or they can give power to the negatives. I need to speak the positive to make a positive impact in my life.

Proverbs 18:21 (again using the King James translation) puts it like this “death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”

I take this to mean that the words I put out there will come back to me as fruit – and I prefer the sweet fruit of positive to the bitter fruit of negative.

Paul addresses the negative in Ephesians 4:31 – 32 sums up the whole idea of being positive focused in my dealings with circumstance and in my dealings with people “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

Staying focused on the positive is not always easy or comfortable – but it will produce powerful results. A positive focus will lay a foundation for growing up the lasting relationships I want for my life. When I choose to see the possibility in others and in my circumstances then I give life to hope that begins to make all things possible.

The foundation begins with five choices or “be attitudes.”

Be real
Be vulnerable
Be sincere
Be quiet
Be positive

A solid foundation will grow up relationships for life.

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“Words have power – and I work to share words that ignite hope and possibility in those they encounter.”

Kathryn Lang continues to grow her career as a wordsmith. She shares words in talks, teachings, columns and stories to provide the hearts that hear with some fuel for hope.

Take a moment to visit <http://www.kathrynclang.com> to read more of her writings. You can also contact Kathryn to speak at your next event or conference by emailing her at kathrynlang@kathrynlang.com.

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