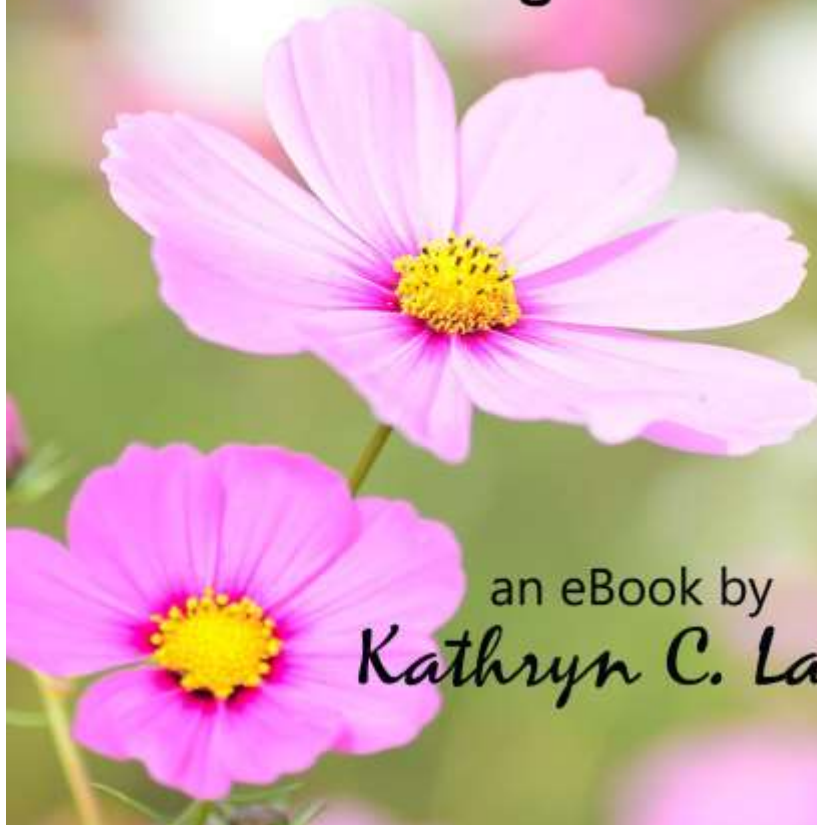


# RELATIONSHIP

# PRIORITIES

**Practicing the More  
Important Actions for  
Growing Relationships**



an eBook by  
*Kathryn C. Lang*

# Relationship Priorities

*Practicing the More Important Actions for Growing Relationships*

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Relationship Priorities

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## Relationships – Priorities

## Relationship Priorities

## **Relationship Priorities – One Me Focus**

Hello and welcome to Growing HOPE where we are investing just a few moments to grow up Hearts Open to Pursue the Extraordinary. I am Kathryn Lang and I am your rainbows and lollipops host because I understand the rainbow connection and I am excited to share it with you.

I love sharing the promises and the possibilities. I get excited and overflow with joy when I have the opportunity to share hope. I can do more and be better when I know I have the chance to spread the positive around.

And let's face it – it is all about me, right?

Okay – maybe it is not all about me in the way that some people like to think about it, but in some ways it really is all about me – what I can do, what I can become, what I can change.

The last week presented me with a unique situation because I was alone for most of the day without anyone to tell “do this” or “pick up that.” If I wanted it done then it was up to me to do it.

It has been a long time since I was left on my own like this. It was a shock and somewhat of a surprise to discover how reliant I had become on the help and support of others.

Don't get me wrong, help and support are some powerful weapons for standing strong in this world. The problem for me is that I had become dependent in places where I had once been sufficient.

Since I also took on two new challenges in my work like, my unique situation required that I get real about what I would do, what I COULD do, and when I would do what I could.

I can get back to that place of sufficient by turning the focus back on me, which is the first part of relationship priorities.

Me focus – if I want to build solid relationships in my life then I need to be invested in being the best me I can be. I get there when I look at self, evaluate self, and focus on self.

Clutter free – release the extras. I have to remove all those things that hold me back from doing what needs to be done.

Hear me – develop the skill of listening, because it is a learned skill that must be honed and practiced. Skilled hearing includes the receptions of words, the awareness of actions and attitude, and also an understanding of the environment.

Investing 101 – the basic steps that lead to relationship investment including thoughts on time, resources, and focus.

Expect Nothing – because it is the expectations that end up getting u in the most trouble.

Before I can get anywhere in getting my relationship priorities straight, I need to get me straight. I have to have a me focus that allows me to recognize when I am off target and then find my way back to the right path when I do.

It is all about me – only this focus is not to be confused with “I syndrome” which leads to all sorts of trouble. This focus is about recognizing I am the only person in the room that I can change.

Developing this type of me focus can be tricky, because it has to be balanced to keep from slipping into “I syndrome” or catching PLOM disease. I need to be prepared to do some radical things to work through me focus.

1. Mold Breaking. I have to be willing to accept that all the molds that I have created for all the people in my life are just a waste.
2. Problem Accepting. I have to recognize my problems so that I can begin to adjust in my journey.
3. Attitude Adjusting. I have to invest energy and resourcing into personal attitude adjustments.
4. Thought Capturing. I need to develop the skill of capturing and corralling the thoughts going through my head and then master the art of correcting them before I set them free again.
5. Word Wielding. I must learn that my words will change me and begin practice using the words for just such an end.

I don't like on most days and REALLY don't like it on the others – but if I am going to get this journey right then I have to focus on me. I have to make the adjustments that will help me see better about where I am going and will also make it possible for me to do better in all that doing I need to get done.

Me focus will also help put relationships in the right priority space. Once I quit blaming others, expecting from others, or maybe just ignoring others so that I can roll around in my own little “I syndrome” party – when I put all of that to the side then I make a place for others to be a part of my life.

It is only the beginning – but this shift in focus is one of the most important steps I will take when it comes to making relationships a priority in my life and for my life.

I have a limited amount of time. All the wishing and hoping won't change that. I have wasted many a day dreaming about what I could do and accomplish if only I had more time. Imagine all that I could have accomplished IF ONLY I had made myself busy in the doing instead of just dreaming.

I have time – time to do what needs to be done – INCLUDING making room for the relationships in my life and for growing up more. I just have to create a plan that makes way for the relationships. I have learned from experiences in my past – both positive and negative experiences – that I have to focus on me to make a way for that to happen.

If I want to step into me focus then I have to be willing to do some mold breaking. It turns out the world is not the only one trying to shove people into a box. I have been known to do some box shoving myself.

I have had the biggest issue with box shoving in the past when it came to dealing with people in leadership positions. I had expectations of how they should be and what they should be. I crafted elaborate boxes to shove them in and shouted from the roof top my disappointment if they ever DARED not to get in said boxes.

The first thing I had to learn was that I am the box creator – not when it comes to others. I have no right or understanding for crafting the mold they will fit into. I need to shatter the molds and the expectations that people will always be what I want, what I need, or what I expect.

If I want to step into me focus then I have to become problem accepting. First, I need to accept that I have the problem – yep, even the rainbows and lollipops host has problems. Although I am perfect in Christ, I am still struggling with my choice of execution – which means I make mistakes.

Second, I have to accept that I may not understand your problem, despite my all-encompassing degree in Tourism and Commercial Recreation, I may still struggle to diagnose your problem. I just need to accept that there may be more to the story than meets the eye and move on.

If I am willing to accept these two problem points then I will be well on my way to establishing a me focus that will make a difference.

If I want to step into me focus then I have to be invested in attitude adjusting. I need to choose to invest in changing my attitudes about my own journey but also about those that I encounter along the way.

I have been dealing with a very unpleasant person in my walk. I took to praying every day that God would soften the heart of this person and help this person find a way through the discouragement that had this person in a pit of darkness.

The person has not changed – as of yet – but by investing in prayer for this person I am adjusting my own attitude.

If I want to step into me focus then I have to develop the skill of thought catching. It takes practice, and on some day it takes a great deal of effort. I have to wrestle the thoughts that cross through my mind that do not match up with my purpose and design.

The more time I spend around negative people, the more thoughts I have to wrestle. This is one of the reasons that I seek to spend most of my time with positive focused folks. Being around negative people or discouraged people begins to bring my thoughts around to what they continuously say.

I want to think thoughts that life up. I want to think thoughts that encourage. I want to think thoughts that inspire hope. I will never stay in that mindset unless I practice and perfect the skill of thought capturing.

If I want to step into me focus then I have to learn all about world wielding. Words have great power – and with great power comes great responsibility. You may not think of words as a super power, but when wielded correctly they can be THE MOST powerful super power you will ever encounter.

That is all it takes to begin to learn to be me focused and to begin the process of creating relationship priorities in my life and for my life.

Mold Breaking  
Problem Accepting  
Attitude Adjusting  
Thought Capturing  
World Wielding

I rarely like looking in the mirror to see how I need to change my life. I much prefer the path of the easy button or “it is all on you.” All my looking has yet to reveal those paths, and instead I have confirmed that the only path is through me. I have to focus on who I am. I have to focus on what I am doing. I have to focus on where I am going. With the right me focus then I create a way for all the rest to fall into place.

## **Foundations for a Me Focus**

I have to turn the attention to self – to focus on me – if I’m going to make a way for relationships to grow and flourish. I must break away from the practice of “What can you do for me” and turn to a place where I practice “what will I do in me that will flow out to others as blessings.”

Okay, that’s not the catchiest of slogans, but it speaks directly to the point. It is not about you – it is about me. A me focus takes it all away from the expectations of what you are going to give me and puts it on to my shoulders of becoming all that I am designed to be.

It is not about what I want you to do, but it is all about what I need to do, and that I need to be willing to do, and about what I am doing that is going to make a way for relationship with you.

The Scripture is packed full of words about how I need to examine myself so that I know what kind of reflections I’m giving off.

Paul did a LOT of “me focus” and he often shared thoughts on the value of that practice.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul explains it like this (coming from the King James translation), “Examine yourself, whether you be in the faith, and prove your own selves.”

Paul is challenging me to look at my own walk and not to look at the walk of others. My journey will not be measured by your journey. Your path will not determine my success.

My journey is measured by Christ alone.

When I put what I am doing up against Christ and what Christ has called me to do THAT will determine whether or not I am reaching my unique design.

Paul touches on this concept again in Galatians 6:4 (this comes from the NIV translation), “Each one should test their own actions then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else.”

This pride is not the kind that is warned against in Proverbs. That pride comes with a haughty spirit and comes just before a fall. This pride is the recognition that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. NOT “I am doing more than you” or “I am doing better than you.” Those attitudes reflect that haughty spirit of pride and will cause issues.

This pride is about me doing my design and about recognizing that I am walking out my design.

James got a little more challenging when he talked about judging others or peaking ill about them in James 4:11. He challenges me not to say bad things about others because when I speak ill of my brother or my sister then I am not even keeping the law myself.

I am using the law to judge the walk of others and tripping down my own path.

In verse 12 from this same passage, James ends with this “Who are you to judge your neighbors?”

It’s not my job to judge others. It’s not really even my job to judge myself. It IS my job to examine my heart and my mind and then adjust these parts of me so that I can take action towards my uniqueness – and actions into the will of God for my life.

I will need to get my mind right in order to make my actions right. The thoughts that are swirling around my head begin to direct my actions. The skill of thought capturing takes practice – diligent and persistent practice.

Paul gives some guidance on how to develop the thought capturing skills in Philippians 4: 4 – 7.

Paul starts in verse 4 by reminding me to rejoice in the Lord. I have to keep my mind tuned to praise and thanksgiving.

He goes on in verses 6 and 7 to explain that I have no reason to worry. I HAVE NO REASON TO WORRY! (Grasp that one concept and you're well on your way to a bold new life).

Paul says I need to take everything to God in prayer and then through that conversation with God I come to the place where the peace of God covers me. That peace will stand guard over my heart and over my mind.

When I turn my focus to growing up in God then it is the peace of God that allows me to capture the thoughts that try to derail my journey.

I can make relationships a priority in my life when I determine to create a "me focus" that gets my life right (and in line with God's purpose) so that I am in the place for relationships to grow.

## **Relationship Priorities – Two Clutter Free**

Some days my search is simple – I wake up to the lilies blooming outside my window, the ones that I planted in honor of my mom. Other days, I have to search a little deeper – I park to wait for summer camp to end, bask in the glorious breeze being offered and try to convince myself that the shrill cry of the weed eaters that break the silence of the breeze are really soothing white noise.

It seems those days when I am not rushed or overwhelmed offer the best opportunity for me to seek out hope. I have also discovered that when I am not rushed or overwhelmed or crowded in some way then I am in a better position to foster relationships and I have more to invest in those relationships.

If I'm not rushed then I have time for a conversation with a stranger that could turn out to be so much more.

If my home is not cluttered then I feel more comfortable welcoming others to visit when they can and not just when I want.

If my work space is open and organized then I can find what I need to do what needs to be done.

I've tried it both ways and only one way works.

Before my third son, I think I had it all together. At least I had it all together enough that we had 22 home school kids to the house every week – despite having two inside cats at the time. I managed to have a clean house, clean bathrooms, and most of the time I had the house cobweb free.

In addition to keeping it all clean, I kept it all organized even though at the time our house was only 2/3s the size it is now. Every space that could be used for storage was used for storage. Everything was labeled. Everything that remained in the home had a home to live.



I also managed to keep alive a house full of plants – including one plant that ran all the way around the bathroom.

Somewhere along the way, I seem to have lost my skills or my focus or maybe a little of both. I did not realize how bad it had gotten until the other day. I buckled down and demanded the house get cleaned – and I was determined it would be as clean as it had been back in the day.

I barked orders and doled out chores to the whole family. It was about an hour into the cleaning when one of my sons looked at me with the oddest expression. “Who’s coming over?”

He thought that because I was serious about cleaning that we must be expecting someone to be coming over for a visit. I was hurt by the comment, but I have also been mulling over it since that day.

I got so caught up in the clutter of my life that I lost the ability to keep order for my life. If I want that back then I will have to take it back. If I want to make a way to make relationships a priority then I have to move towards a clutter free life.

Activities first – evaluate the benefits and costs and determine which are only eating away at your time.

Hobbies second – consider which hobbies are taking away from limited resources without a return on that investment.

The home third – it is time to release all the stuff around the house by either throwing it away, giving it away, or repurposing it to work for your current life.

Tasks fourth – examine all of the tasks currently on your regular to-do list and see what really needs doing.

Goals fifth – let go of those things that are not fueled by passion or desire and definitely those that are not moving you in the direction of your unique purpose.

Clutter hinders everything. It gets in the way of my peace because I am constantly thinking about the mess, the pile, or the possibility that someone might show up without notice. It gets in the way of financial blessing because if I can’t see what I have then I can’t know what I need. It gets in the way of relationships because if I am busy avoiding the piles and the clutter then I will likely avoid people – at least on occasion – in the process.

Clutter eats away at everything. It takes up my time because it takes more to manage clutter than to work with organization. It takes up my resources because I have to keep juggling the clutter or investing in more ways to deal with the clutter. It takes up my chance at relationships because it gets my focus.

I need to take actions to be clutter free so that I can make room for relationship priorities. I have to clear out the clutter in my schedule, in my focus, and in my home so that I can invest the efforts into relationships.

Clutter free living is not a natural born trait for me. If you don't believe me then you can ask my husband. He would be more than happy to expand on the understanding.

When my third son was born, the second son was seven years old. We added on to the two bedroom house so that the older boys would not have to share a room with an infant. In the process of moving their room, I finally agreed to give up the over 200 stuffed animals I had positioned around their room. I had even designed special shelves just to house the stuffed animals.

They were all mine – ones that I had collected over my lifetime. It was hard to let them go and there are still days when I miss several of them – but they were not practical or necessary for my life today. They were stuff and they were stuff in the way of my sons own interests and focus.

That's what clutter does – it gets in the way – and it can be especially good at getting in the way of relationships – maybe because of the strife that always grows out of clutter or maybe because of the lack of comfort in the clutter.

Clutter will get in the way of relationships unless I take purposeful action to address and remove the clutter around me.

Activities first – because we are an OVERLY active society. Early on, I allowed my sons to sign up for one after school activity. I always hoped they would choose the same activity, but never made it a requirement. They could only choose one a semester because I knew that too many activities would clutter our schedule.

I was at one practice when a mom came in and retrieved her son 20 minutes before the practice ended. “We have to get to football practice” she informed the coach. The kid went from school to practices to home to do homework to start it all over again. I have no doubt he was exhausted because I was exhausted just hearing about it.

I've avoided the clutter in the schedule of my boys and then managed to fall face first into clutter in my own life. Back to back meetings broke me of that. I began practicing the word “no” when asked to participate (because we know you will do a good job) and leaving room for a nice cup of coffee on the back porch with my dad instead.

Hobbies second – because we are taught to have fun and do things for self. It is good to take care of self and to enjoy life, but not at the cost of everything else. I have talked about my flower gardens, and I LOVE having gardens, but this hobby has fallen to the side for the time being. I want to get out there and get my beds in show order, but I also know that I have other purposeful actions that I need to take.

I have to review all of my hobbies and then determine which are benefiting my journey and which are just eating away at my resources. I let go of those things that are not a help most of the time and always those things that are a hindrance.

Home third – because the home is where I spend most of the time that I have to invest and I want it to be of the most use that it can be. I have been moving furniture and rearranging so that the spaces that we have can serve to host events and gatherings - but I also have to remove all of the boxes of stuff that have accumulated since the tornadoes or all the rearranging in the world will not help.

I need to clear it out, let it go, or give it a new home with someone who will love and care for it. If it is not a benefit or a blessing to me or my family then it is time to release the clutter.

Tasks fourth – because we all can add too much to a to-do list and end up getting nothing done because the to-do list is overwhelming. I need to focus on the tasks that move me towards my purpose, even just a little, and let go of those tasks that are distracting me from that direction.

Goals fifth – because sometimes the goals I set are there because I think they should be and not because I really want them. Several years ago I set a goal to build an organization. It was a nice goal that would benefit me and others. I would work at it and on it and then I would place it on the back burner while I tackled other things.

When I took the time to evaluate the goal, it was not something that was fueled by passion or a deep desire that would help me get over the tough moments. I need to look at all of my goals and let go of those that are not igniting my passion to pursue.

Clutter gets in the way and the only way to get it out of the way is to let it go.

## **Foundations for Clutter Free Living**

It is all about relationships. Everything that I do and everything that is worth doing has roots in relationships. Unfortunately this world is so noisy and busy that there is often little room for relationships to grow and flourish. I try to crowd relationships in around a schedule so packed that we can't even sit down for a meal.

Relationships do NOT like to be crowded. They need space and air so that they can fully develop.

I create the space and air necessary when I choose to release the clutter in my life. It is not just about getting rid of stuff or making space, but it is about creating a life that is decent and orderly and **PREPARED!**

All of my sons are involved in one aspect of scouting or another, and if scouting has taught me anything it is to **BE PREPARED** – not because it is there motto, but because when you are trusting teenage boys to let you know what is going on then you need to be prepared for anything and everything at all times.

Because I have been invested in releasing the clutter as of late, I was prepared when my son announced that the scouts would be spending the weekend camping in our field (which by default means they would be spending the weekend tramping in and out of our home). Because I have been actively choosing to let go of activities, I was prepared when my son called to say they were getting out of scout training early and I needed to be there in two hours – which just happened to be a two hour drive away.

A clutter free life may not be prepared for everything, but it will be more prepared because of the consistent orderly state.

Paul talks about the importance of being orderly in 1 Corinthians 14 – he is talking about how things should run in the meetings of the church – from prophecy to speaking in tongues because apparently the church in Corinth had become a little chaotic and a lot cluttered with people just talking whenever and over each other so that there was no focus.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God is not the author of confusion. God is the author of peace in all churches AND in all saints.

I'm a saint. If my life is not in peace then I am working outside the lines of the Author. Paul goes on to remind the church (and by church I mean the saints and not the building) that they should "Let all things be done decently and in order." This is from the King James translation.

I used to think that I was a non-orderly kind of person. Since I am at my best when I am flying by the seat of my pants, why would I need order? The more I have studied Scripture the more I recognize that order is not a military regimen, but an arranging – it is positioning things so that the most important is recognized first.

Paul brings up this idea and understanding of orderly when he writes to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul shares this "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Again, this is from the King James translation.

For the longest time I saw this Scripture in the light of study. I needed to study the word and be invested in the word to show myself approved. In the light of this study thought, I saw a whole new message.

What if God showed up at my house right now? Would I be happy to see Him or would I panic because I knew there was a stack of dirty towels in the bathroom? If I would not be excited to welcome God into my home and into my daily life then it may be time to release the clutter and get back to a place of orderly and decent in all areas of my walk.

## **Relationship Priorities – Three Hear Me**

I started dancing – not for rain needs but for the joy of dancing when I was only seven years old. I found out recently that I was in the first dance class that particular instructor taught and I continued with classes all the way through high school. Every year ended with a recital.

One year, my friend and I decided to perform a duet on top of all the other dances we were already scheduled to dance. On the night of the recital – and I remember this like it was yesterday – the music started but I was not in the best position to hear it. I missed the cue because I couldn't hear and that meant I started two beats ahead of time – and for a dancer two months can seem like a life time.

I danced like I was on time though – which messed with my friend who danced on time and looked like she was off time because I stepped on stage first. All because I couldn't hear or didn't choose to listen close enough.

Hearing is a valuable sense – not just for dancing but for growing and fostering relationships as well.

I was sitting in the movie theater with my husband – watching “Back to the Future.” This was the original showing so you can imagine how far back we had to go to get to the future – actually the future is now according to the movie, but I digress.

We were sitting there watching the movie, but I was thinking about the amazing guy sitting next to me. “I love you.” I said the words for the first time without thinking about them.

His amazing response to my declaration – “What?” He says he heard but was in shock, but I heard in his response that he hadn't been listening.

What we hear makes a big difference in what happens next.

Husbands and wives can be great examples for listening – for good examples and for bad. Several years later, my husband and I were sitting together on the couch watching a show. When the commercial break started he turned to me and said “I don't think I like you any more, sometimes I don't even like being around you.” I have literally written a book based on this encounter, but when I was sharing the story recently it dawned on me that maybe I had heard him wrong.

Or maybe I took the words that he shared and turned them into words that I thought he said – but it is very possible and maybe even likely that I heard him wrong.

Sometimes the words that we hear are not said the way we hear them.

Most of the time we think of hearing as a one dimensional sense, but there are a number of components to skilled hearing. If I want to make relationships a priority then I need to learn how to hear from all the different dimensions.

1. Hear the words – and by this I mean take a moment to focus on the words so that you can take them in.
2. Repeat the words – say the words back in the form of a question or just a statement for clarification.
3. Watch for the unspoken – experts say . . . well let's face it that experts say a LOT. In regards to non-verbal communication they don't agree on the percentages, but they do agree that most of our communication is non-verbal (discerning husband will also agree).
4. Lean in – when listening leaning in shows interest. It shows the speaker that you are engaged with the words.
5. Be alert to the surroundings – watch what is going on. Be aware of the other people around, the current circumstances, and any number of other factors. All of these, and so much more, can affect the meaning behind the words.

I have to actively engage in listening if I want to learn to hear. I have to be willing to hear others if I want to make room for relationships to become a priority. Hearing is more than words, and learning how to hear can be one of the greatest tools for walking out this life journey.

I live in a house full of men, so I understand the importance of active hearing – mainly because I never seem to get anyone around my house to listen when I want. They may hear a few words here and there but not enough to discern the truth behind the words.

I learned early on in my parenting of boys that if they were not looking at me then they probably weren't hearing me. If only I had learned that lesson before I had a husband – but that is water under the bridge – LOTS of water.

I have taken the lessons I learned from dealing with a house full of men and also a few I've gathered along my life journey and I've created my five rules (or suggestions if you prefer) for learning how to HEAR ME.

1. Hear the words – because the words matter. Words have power and influence and sometimes valuable directions.

I was explain something to my oldest son – something of such importance and value that I can't even remember now – but it was important then and made certain to choose my words with care so that there would be no misunderstanding or confusion. My son left the room and I noticed my husband laughing. When I asked him why, he told me that my son hadn't heard a word that I had said.

I knew my husband had to be wrong because I had put so much thought into the words that I shared, so I called him back into the room so that I could prove his dad was wrong. "Tell your dad what I just told you." I encouraged him.

Let's just say my son wasn't even close – not only did he not use any of the words I had crafted so carefully but he didn't even have their meaning.

The first rule of hearing is to actually hear the words.

2. Repeat the words – now this IS a lesson I learned from my husband on more than one occasion. Apparently we are both such master communicators that we can't talk to each other some days. On those days, I am learning to ask him the meaning behind the words he shared. On those days, I am learning to repeat the words back to him so that I can clarify the words and the meaning that I heard. I make the point to say the words back to him and the effort to engage the words and the person.

The second rule of hearing is to repeat the words.

3. Watch for the unspoken – this rule has gotten many people in more trouble than can be measured when they share their words online or in texts. Certain non-verbal cues just do not translate online. I'm still learning this lesson myself – sarcasm can be particularly tricky.

I saw a post a friend made and I made a joke about the post – only it was an off the cuff, and dare I say sarcastic joke but somehow my friend missed all the amazing nuances that I shared. Instead of laughing with me at my joke, my friend took it upon herself to explain the substance and validity of her post.

When it comes to hearing right and hearing well, I need to pay as much attention to how something is said as I do the words that are used.

The third rule of hearing is watch for the unspoken.

4. Lean in – move forward in the chair and uncross your arms. Taking a relaxing posture and leaning in makes the speaker feel like you are engaged in the words. I learned this lesson from my dad who had spent years in sells. It was the practice I utilized every time I had to do an interview. It was one of the reasons I was so successful in whatever interview I did – from beauty pageants to government internships.

I try to make a point of utilizing these practices when I am sitting in on a talk or presentation by another person – especially if they seem nervous or uncomfortable. Leaning in and engaging their words seems to calm the nerve and makes it easier for them to continue with the words they need to share.

The fourth rule of hearing is to lean in.

5. Be alert – because the words that are spoken are rarely the whole message. I remember sitting in mass communication class and listening to the professor ramble on about how most of what we say is said without words. He said the highest percentage of communication occurs non-verbally.

Duh – was all I could hear – because I had just finished surviving high school and anyone that gets through that gauntlet understands that words are on the surface story.

It is amazing that I got out of high school alive, because I did recognize the non-verbal cues and all too often used that power not even remotely for good. I remember sitting all night with a friend as he whined about the love of his life leaving him. Later that week, I happened to pass his former girlfriend in the hall and she made a catty comment about that time I spent with her former boyfriend.

Now I could see all over her that she was hurt and frustrated over what had happened. I didn't know her side, but I knew from his side that this was not a high school crush – this was a deep love. Instead of trying to engage her and soothe her, I pushed every button I could find – and almost ended up in a physical altercation if not for another friend that swooped in and swept me away before the fight could get started.

The words that are shared are usually on the tip of the iceberg and it is what is underneath the surface that ends up sinking ships.

The fifth rule of hearing is to be alert to what lies beneath.

Learning to hear me is about much more than just listening to words. There are times that engaged hearing will require all of the senses to get to the heart of the words. When I learn to hear then I set up a strong foundation for making relationships a priority.

## **Foundations for Learning to Hear Me**

I have not always practice the art of hearing. Back in my more argumentative days – and do NOT ask my husband when this was because he will tell you yesterday – but in the days when I enjoyed a good argument, I rarely listened to the words that were being shared in those moments. Instead, I was busy putting together my own words to share in rebuttal.

That type of passive hearing – or really more unhearing – never assists in the growing of relationships – NEVER. I can assist in the destruction of relationships because I am more focused on me than I am on you and that shows you how important you are to me.

I need to focus. I need to pay attention. I need to develop the skill for hearing so that I hear what is being said by the other person instead of getting caught up in my own words that I want to release.

Growing up, I heard all too often that there was a reason God gave me two ears and one mouth. I took it as a challenge to find a way to talk more and make up for the deficit. I am certain that was not how it was meant.

Scripture is not silent on the call for me to be silent – although I don't think it calls me out by name (but there are days when I would NOT be surprised if it did). James states it pretty plain in



James 1:15 “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” This is from the King James translation.

First, I need to be swift to hear – not swift to act or swift to respond. The word “hear” in this verse refers to hearing in various senses and even includes the definition “to understand.” That kind of hearing does not happen unless I am actively engaged in the listening – when I am making the most of those two ears and keeping the one mouth shut.

I noticed that James also points out that when I am swift to hear – to be hearing with my various sense – then I will be slow to speak and when I am slow to speak I will be slow to wrath. Hearing does more for me than help create a priority in relationships. Hearing makes it possible for me to squash strife before it can get started.

Proverbs touches on a similar idea that James shared. In Proverbs 18:13 says this: “He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame unto him.”

I did not have to read this Scripture very many times before it sank in. It was a driving force as to why I quit being challenged to speak more and I began to choose to be quiet instead. There are days when I am a stellar success in being quiet and just listening. There are also those days when I am not so much of a “how to” example and I am more of a warning.

WHEN I get my hearing right then I get the rest of it right or at least more right than I would have gotten if I had just let my tongue run free.

I need to practice hearing – the engaged hearing that allows me to understand more – if I want to make relationships the priority they need to be in my life.

## **Relationship Priorities – Four Investing 101**

I read recently about a man that bought a gold mine during the California Gold Rush. He was excited when after a short time he struck a gold vein. He went to all of his friends and family to garner financial support to purchase more equipment to do more mining. He returned to the mountain and began digging away – and digging – and digging. This time the only thing he pulled out of the mountain was rock.

He finally gave up and sold the gold mine to a local farmer before returning to home.

The farmer invested in the expert advice of a geologist who then inspected the site and determined that the gold vein the first man had found was not gone but had shifted just a few feet.

The first owner thought the gold vein had died and he walked away. He had invested in all the right equipment to do the digging, but did not have the right knowledge to know where to dig.

The farmer invested in the right knowledge and because of that investment the gold mine produced millions of dollars for the farmer. What had been pronounced dead and worthless became priceless with the right investment.

More often than not, people are much like that gold mine. We go into the moment expecting to discover something that will provide us with wealth, but we give up when things become too tough or when we only get rocks. Each person has a great gold vein of value hidden inside them - even more than we can begin to comprehend.

Sometimes we get excited about an initial discovery but soon pronounce the person worthless if nothing more shows itself. We give up too soon and walk away from the possibility.

If I truly want to discover the wealth and value in others then I have to follow some basic tips for investing.

1. Be committed – make a plan for purposeful actions that engage others. Set the limits and then keep moving forward into those limits. Things will happen that make it easy to walk away but if I make that commitment first then I have a way to be intentional in investing for relationship priorities.
2. Due diligence – take time to learn something about the people you are engaging. It is important to know where you are investing before you begin making the effort. You will not know all, but due diligence can help you make better choices.
3. Avoid the allure of position – treat everyone is equally important from the janitor to the CEO to the cashier – because they are.
4. Learn for yourself – word of mouth may be good for advertising but it is not the wisest path when it comes to investing in relationships.
5. Don't sweat the small stuff – because stuff will come up. We will not always agree. We will not even always get along. And that is OKAY!

Relationships are costly, but they produce immeasurable returns. Everything in life worth doing and everything worth having has its roots in relationships at one level or another. I want to keep digging until I find where the vein continues. I want to invest in the right things and the right knowledge so that I grow the opportunity up into all that it can be. I want to keep working at it until I uncover all the gold nuggets. I do not want to make the declaration that the relationship is worthless only to discover the real wealth was only a moment away.

I have been the “empty mine.” It still rips a hole in my heart when I think about my friend giving up and walking away.

I have been the one that made the declaration. I think it hurts my heart even more to know that I left those possibilities behind.

Relationships are worth the investment but I have to make the choice to make the investment. It is all on me. I can find an excuse to walk away – they are scattered around every day. But excuses will not bring the relationships to life.

I can put the burden on others, but others are not responsible for what I build and grow. Only I can make the investments for relationships in my life.

I know that some of the relationships will grow up into mighty oak trees and provide comfort and support for a lifetime. I know that some of the relationships will grow up into moon vines and produce amazing blooms that are gone when the morning rises. All of the relationships have something in them that make the investment worth it.

I have limited resources to invest in anything. Even with a few weeks of extra time, I found that I am still not able to do it all. I am a few minutes closer, but not quite there. In an effort to get things right in my home, in my life, and in the Growing HOPE ministry, I am weighing carefully all of the investments that I am making.

I need to weight relationship investments with the same care – because I have a limited amount of resources to pour into the relationships in my life and for my life and I want to be certain that I choose better and that I don't walk away from a potential gold vein when it is only just a few steps away.

1. I need to be committed because it will cost. I invited someone to come and stay with me one holiday because she had no place to go for the holidays. It was the right thing to do and I committed to hosting her for the long weekend.

My choice to have her stay limited what I could do with my time back at home. I had to take her interests into consideration when making plans. It also inconvenienced some of my existing relationships because they had expected us to have free time together. My commitment to having her visit helped ease some of that discomfort so that I was not alienating her because of my choices.

I did discover WAY too early in her stay that she is not someone I want to be in close quarters with for an extended period of time. We have vastly different interests and even more vastly different experiences. Had I not made the commitment, I would probably have taken her back early.

Any relationship – whether short term or long term – requires a commitment of time, of resources, and sometimes of self-sacrifice to some degree or another. If I do not commit to seeing it through then I will likely walk away from the mine when the gold vein is just a few feet away.

I learned a great deal about the young lady who stayed with me during that time – tidbits and knowledge about her and about other areas of the world – all of which I would have missed had I not made a commitment and followed through on that commitment. She also invited me to stay with her which provided me with an opportunity to travel that I would also have missed.

2. Make time for due diligence. I often remind people that it is a personal responsibility to read the fine print. I have to take the time to read through the terms of service or rules of engagement.

Several years ago, I was first venturing into email marketing – or really more emails asking for support and encouragement in my journey and not so much buy this or that. I sent out an email blast to all of those people who were in my contact list – and only people I had actively engaged with were ON that list.

I received a curt response from one lady – one that I had considered an online friend because we had both engaged through emails on a variety of occasions. She informed me that she did not ask for the email I had sent and did not sign up to be on the list.

I never emailed her again and promptly deleted her from my contacts. I had not done my due diligence when it came to engaging her through that medium. I still think she over-reacted, but I should have taken more time to learn the ropes.

3. Avoid the allure of position. Everyone is created unique and what I know and have perfected may be the exact place you are struggling. If you only see my position then you may miss the nuggets of gold hidden in the mountain.

I read about a speaker that had to go to the doctor's office one day. She had no desire to be around people that particular day but it was the only way to see the doctor. She took a seat alone but soon another lady joined her. The speaker groaned to herself because she knew the lady had taken the seat just to get something from her. After a brief conversation, the speaker walked away from the encounter enlightened and lifted up because of something the woman had shared.

Position does not make someone know more or of more worth.

4. Learn for yourself. My friend set me up on a blind date with a friend of her boyfriends. She told me he was a great guy and new to town. I agreed. We had a pleasant enough time, but we were definitely NOT second date material for either party.

It turns out that was a good thing. He was charged with assault on his next girlfriend. It was only later that another friend said – I could have told you he was crazy. If I had taken the time to learn for myself then I would never have put myself at risk.

5. Don't sweat the small stuff. Relationships are not crisp and clean and perfect. They are messy and a little chaotic and often off balance a little. Sometimes you invest more and sometimes I invest more. As long as the investments remain healthy then I can let the little things go and focus on the bigger picture.

Relationships take investment and patience – some take more than others. I have to be willing to make the investments necessary to grow up relationships AND I have to be engaged enough in the process that I make the right choices for those investments.

## **Foundations for Investing 101**

I know how much stronger I am when I have others backing me up. Relationships give me the courage to do things that I would never do on my own. But relationships do not happen on their own – they happen when I make the choice to invest in the people that I encounter.

It is not about what they will give me – it is not about what I will gain from the relationship – it is about being relentlessly helpful for the sake of being relentlessly helpful – that is how I ultimately invest in others and grow the relationships that will become the foundation for all areas of my life.

Jesus was constantly making the effort to be relentlessly happy – often in ways that probably annoyed the people around him – at least at times.

In Matthew 20 – Jesus and his disciples were on their way out of town – which means they were on their way to somewhere else. Two blind men sitting on the side of the road heard that Jesus was passing by and started yelling “Lord, have mercy on us.” Despite having somewhere else he was going, Jesus STOPPED. He called to the blind men and then actively engaged them when he asked them what they wanted.

In Matthew 9 – Jesus was going with the synagogue official to heal his daughter – who was on the verge of death mind you – when again Jesus STOPPED to engage another hurt person and to acknowledge her healing. She was already healed, because she had believed that all she needed to do was to touch the hem of Jesus’s garment and she would be healed. So she did, and she was, but Jesus still STOPPED to invest in a relationship with the women.

It takes getting to a place of being relentlessly helpful to really be in a position to invest in relationships. That place only comes when I make the purposeful choice to put others above myself – or to as Paul says in Philippians 2:3 “to esteem” – and when I did a little research on the origin of this word I found that it was about being a protector of another – and I like that image. I esteem others when I choose to protect them – I lift others up when I am guarding their heart and minds to the best of my ability.

This place of protection also helps me avoid falling into the trap of position – where I see the position of a man and believe that relationship will do more for me than one of a lesser position. If I am looking at the people as a protector and not the protectee – that changes everything.

James tackles the idea of thinking of others higher than some when he addresses being no respecter of person in James 2. James reminds me that my faith is NOT in man but in Jesus Christ – and if my faith is not in man then how can one man be of more valuable than the next.

Developing the practice of focusing on others – making that investment into relationships – is key to building those relationships and making them a priority. It is a choice. It is my focus. And when I do it, when I take the time to make the investment, then I will see a difference in my life.

## **Relationship Priorities – Five**

## Let Go

I see just how powerful hope can be in a life. I have also seen how destructive discouragement became. It all started with a friend's house. She had been through some rough times – losing a spouse and struggling through health issues as well.

Her home began to reflect her heart. Things became cluttered and untidy. After a while the house went into deeper disarray and the house became more of a prison than a home. She spent more of her time outside than inside so that she wouldn't have to address the mess – staying outside even when temperatures began to drive up towards 100 degrees.

I decided to help and blocked off some time in my day to help my friends. Together – because we are stronger when we are together – together we began to sort through the clutter and the chaos that had invaded her life. With each cleared space, her demeanor began to shift. By the end of our time together, I could see hope taking root. She had her home back, but more importantly she had a footing in her life once again.

She found her hope in part because I made the choice to invest in her. I knew that she would not be able to return the effort. She was not in a position to return the effort on any level – financially or physically. I didn't do it because I was expecting her to do something in return. I did it because I knew it needed to be done and I knew I was in apposition to do it.

Making relationship a priority is not any more complicated than that. I made a choice to be relentlessly helpful without an expectation of return.

There have been times when I got caught in the confusion of looking at the benefits for me. There have been other times when I gave my all and then some, only to discover too late that others were just taking advantage. I am learning to find my balance and it starts with knowing what I can and can't afford to give.

Setting my balance point makes it easier for me to say yes and it also makes it easier for me to say no when necessary – and NO is sometimes necessary.

Getting to that point of balance only became possible when I made the choice to see things from a new perspective – EXPECT NOTHING. I followed and still am practicing following five basic tips to get to that new perspective.

1. Let go of the need to get. It will be relatively easy the first time – to let go of that need to see a return. It might even be fairly simple the second time. It is developing a consistency in this mindset that can be the real challenge.
2. What have I done for you lately – or even better . . . what have I done. I need to be aware of the investments I am making and stop relying on the past moments of helping.
3. Ask to help – with clarity and with specific details. It is not just an offer to help – but to give a precise and intentional offer.

4. Keep room for helping. This becomes a little easier when decluttering is part of the schedule. It is important that I find an excess of time and resources so I can focus on helping and engaging without expectation of return.

5. Know the Real Source. The people that I engage with and that I build relationships with are not the source of my blessings, my opportunities, and definitely not my happiness. When I understand that Real Source then I free others to be focused on their own journey AND I free me up to let go of the need to have a return because my return comes from the Real Source.

Relationships are constantly growing and evolving and shifting. When I release the need to get back – when I find the place of not expecting a return – then I make room for relationships to grow into all that they are supposed to be.

The more I have to do, the less I look around to see what others may need or want. When you are busy pursuing your world dominance then there is plenty to do.

My schedule these last few weeks has been easier in some ways and more challenging than others but I am making purposeful choices to engage in helping.

The more I engage in helping and the more I seek out opportunities, the more I have to adjust. But the more I practice the easier it becomes AND the more I end up getting done in the long run – for myself as well as for others.

Mastering the art of releasing expectations does take practice, but it will make room for more than I could have ever expected in the first place.

1. Let go – let go of the need to get something back. It is human nature – or maybe more that it is society taught – that I deserve to get something for my efforts. Etiquette teaches me that I should at least receive a thank you note. It does not always work out that way and I shouldn't be worried about whether it does.

I had an aunt that would get annoyed if others didn't act grateful in one form or another – she would even get annoyed if they didn't act that way towards me. I think part of her annoyance was that when I did for others it took away from the time I had to invest in doing for her – but it may have only felt that way.

When she would find out I did something for someone or was going to do something for them she would begin the litany of questions including the inevitable “What have they done for you?” She would then go on to explain how I was letting others take advantage of me and that I needed to quit doing so much for others.

I tried – unsuccessfully – to help her understand that I didn't do it because they did stuff for me – I did it for them because I could and it was right and that was all the expectation I had from my efforts.

2. What have I done for you lately? This should be the question that drives my actions or maybe a simple “what have I done” would be even better about getting me back on track. I can get caught up in what I did the other day and forget that each new day presents new possibilities for investing in others and with others.

Several years ago, I was in a position to do some major helping with a friend. It took several days a week over several weeks to get most of the work completed. Things happened in my own life that I needed to deal with, but I promised to come back soon and help finish up. Two years later, I am finally making good on that promise. I had been resting on what I had done and forgotten all about what I still knew I could do.

3. Ask to help – and be specific about what is offered. This is especially important in times of crisis because we often forget what we need let alone remember to ask someone to help with those things we are forgetting.

My husband and I became aware of this after my second miscarriage. Folks were nice and said things like “let us know if we can do anything.” Then one lady called and said, “I would like to help you out during this time. Can I bring a meal for you and your family?” It was an easy thing to say yes to and it was something that helped us out. Another friend called and offered to come mow the lawn for us. Again, it was specific and intentional.

From that time on, my husband and I will ask “What do you need help with?” If they do not know then we will get even more specific about where we see a need or where we know we can help. Picking up children is a GREAT way to help parents in a crisis.

4. Keep room for help. I have talked a great deal about getting rid of the clutter because clutter in our lives, in our homes, and in our wallets, can limit so much of what we can do. I need room and space if I am going to be always available to be relentlessly helpful.

It may not be convenient, but if there is room then I can make a way.

The other day someone called me and asked if I could come to her house help out with something for a few hours. I said yes, although it meant I had to adjust my schedule some. I had my schedule worked out in such a way that it was possible to adjust it. I had room to be helpful.

It may not be as quick and painless as they say it will be, but making room will help cushion the extension.

My husband agreed to go help out a friend. “It will only take five minutes.” He had been assured. It did take five minutes to drive to his friend’s house. It also took five minutes to drive back. The time there was calculated in HOURS and not in minutes. My husband had set aside the time to help, but because it went over it crowded everything else in his schedule. He called me and I backed him up – because that is what we do.

That is why we need room in our lives and in our schedules so that we CAN help.



5. Know the real source – because people will try to convince you that it is something that it is not. The world will try to convince you that it is something that it's not. My real source is my Father – and when I know my source then I no longer NEED to expect anything from anyone else.

Relationships require investments – but the investments need to come from a place of purposeful intent – not from a place of expectation of return. When I let go of expectations, then I free up the relationships to grow into all they can be.

## **Foundations for Learning to Let Go**

“What Have You Done for ME, Lately?” was a popular song a few decades back – partly because of the singer and mostly because of the music (in my opinion). Many people took up the song title and the idea behind the song and made a life campaign out of it.

Relationships are never grown up in expectations such as that. When I start expecting you to do then I jeopardize all that we have built. I have to let go of my expectations in order to free up the relationship to become all that it can be.

What I am doing is not about me – and it is not about what others can give me (since I know where my real source is) – but it is all about being a reflection of God in this world and to this world.

Jesus puts it plainly in Matthew 5:16 - Jesus has just finished giving the “Be attitudes” – the Sermon on the Mount where He breaks down the actions that we are supposed to take and how those actions are a benefit to us. Jesus then goes on to encourage His followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He then makes this statement (according to the King James translation) “Let your light so shine before me, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Even my actions towards someone are not about me or that person but about God. When I get my head around this one concept, then I am well on my way to changing my world. When I recognize that it for God and to God and that the source of all my return is from God that changes EVERYTHING.

Paul reminds us in his letters that we are supposed to be actively invested in others.

In Romans 15:1, Paul tells us that the strong need to take up the slack for the weak instead of focusing on self-pleasing.

In Galatians 6:2, Paul writes that we are to bear one another's burdens.

In Philippians 2:4, Paul again reminds us that we are to look to the interests of others.

In Galatians 6:10, Paul puts it simply “Let us do good to all men.”

And finally, Jesus reminds me that my actions reflect Whose I am to the world. In John 13: 34 - 35 Jesus has just finished kneeling down to wash the feet of the followers and Jesus declares a new commandment: “Love one another – as I have loved you, you are to love each other this same way.” Now Jesus had just shown an example of love by choosing to kneel down and serve his followers with the washing of the feet. He was declaring that we are to be in service to each other. Jesus then goes on to say: “by this – by the way you choose to love and serve each other, the world will see whose you are.”

What I choose to do will reflect on Whose I am. The effort I invest in others – in building and growing relationships – reflects on the One that invests in me. I make way for doing more and giving more when I learn not to expect anything in return.

Relationships must be a priority in my life because I am designed to be in relationships and I am designed for relationships and we are stronger when we walk through this together.

Choose to be “me” focused  
Become clutter free  
Learn to “hear me”  
Understand and pursue investing 101  
And come to a place of expecting nothing

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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](mailto:kathrynlang@kathrynlang.com).

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