



## ...ON RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone has finally left the house, and at last I am alone. It's serenely quiet and it's wonderful. Truth is, within two hours, I'll probably feel lonely.

Isolation or inclusion. I wonder what your preference is today? After more than 20 years of nurturing family and being immersed in a highly team-oriented workplace, I thought by this stage, getting along with people would become more natural, more routine. Instead, I find myself working harder at understanding the people I know and more persistent about staying connected. Why isn't this process getting easier?

Almost everything about life pushes us away from authentically living in community, an environment that is best summed up as "love one another." The way we've wired the world, it's a hassle to really care for each other. Over a million children will die this year because of poverty issues; every four seconds, another death due to starvation.

North America is so absorbed in the consumerism mentality that it isn't practical to figure out a way to meet these chronic needs. And if geopolitics is too big a concept to consider under the banner of "love one another," how about the fact that we have loaded our lives with such enormous levels of stress? Fortunately, much of this can be remedied by prayerfully re-evaluating our priorities.

The way we prioritize our lives, shapes everything from how quickly new parents return to employment, to how many activities the kids are enrolled in, and to what we all continue to say yes to. Go back for a moment to the desperate news coverage of victims of September 11th. The most gripping

vision for me was the messages sent by those in the World Trade Centre towers who knew their lives were about to end. All people wanted to say was, "I love you."

When Jesus, the standard for what is good, was asked what is the most important thing humanity should pursue, he gave a double answer: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:30,31 NIV).

That kind of love invades our space and is seldom a natural fit. It's hard fought for, it requires sacrifice, and it makes all the difference in the world as to how we face tomorrow. As for something concrete to measure it by, I have a 13-point checklist that tells me whether I am living in a healthy, relational way with the people around me. This list comes from the New Testament and was the guide for self-preservation and growth of the early church:

Rejoice together, carry each others' burdens, restore each other, suffer together, pray for one another, teach and correct each other, refresh each other, encourage each other, forgive one another, confess to each other, be truthful with each other, challenge each other to good deeds, give to other people.

If you can sit down and put a name beside each of those 13 qualities of someone you have received that love from, or someone you have given it to, you're doing great. For others of us, there's plenty of opportunity to start. The possibilities for how the expression "love one another" transforms our world are endless. ☩