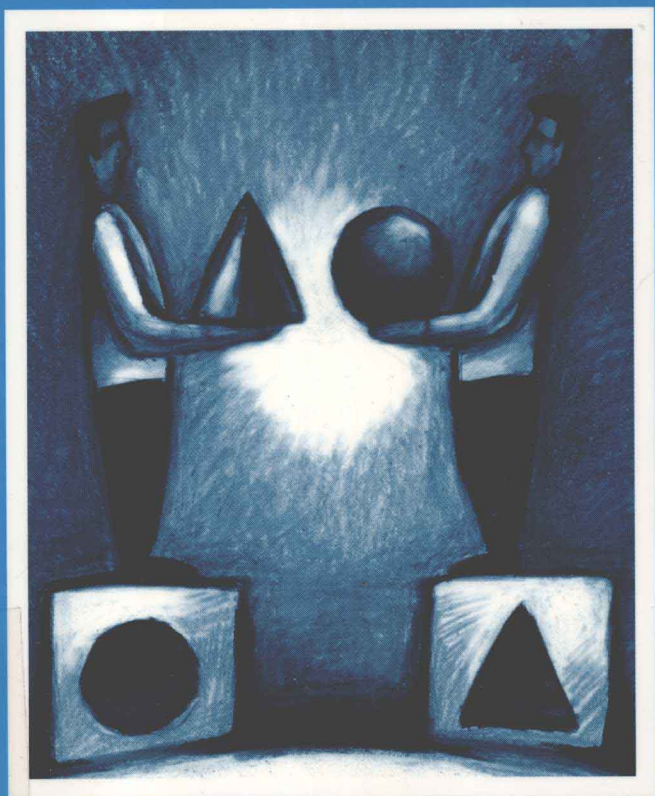


A Christian's Guide to Good Human Relations

ANSWERS TO YOUR PEOPLE PROBLEMS



JOHN G. KERBS

Answers to Your People Problems

**The Christian's Guide to
Good Human Relations**

by John G. Kerbs

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PREFACE

Human relations is an important factor in the life of every Christian. Practicing the principles of Christian behavior which John Kerbs sets forth in *Your People Problems* will help every reader get along better with others.

The author's interesting style of writing and many illustrations make this book highly readable. And the fact that he appears to practice what he preaches makes the high ideals which he sets forth in the field of human relations even more meaningful and acceptable to those who know the author well.

Glance through the chapter headings, read the first chapter, "Love Everybody," and I predict you will read most of the book before you put it down. Most of the chapters are short, the message of each having been put forth in a direct captivating way with little tedious sermonizing.

As with sermons, so with books—their worth can seldom be judged by length. Though this volume be small, following its helpful counsel will almost certainly draw you closer to your Saviour and to those about you.

Robert H. Pierson.

Former President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He was the President of the South African Division when this preface was written and where the author served when he prepared the original manuscript for this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Kerbs was born in Shattuck, Oklahoma, and is a graduate of Lodi Academy, La Sierra University, and Andrews University. At the time of the publication of this third edition, he is the president of Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. He spent almost fifteen years in the literature ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, five of those in South Africa. He was the director of literature evangelism in the South African Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists when he prepared the original manuscript for this book.

Since that time he has been an academy and college Bible teacher and principal of Pacific Union College Preparatory School and Loma Linda Academy, both in California. Just prior to beginning his presidency of Union College in 1991, he was the Associate Dean for Admissions at Loma Linda University School of Medicine.

His wife, Nancy, teaches English as a Second Language at Union College. Their children are Jeffry, a dentist in Escondido, California; James, an orthopedic surgeon in Lexington, Ohio; and John, who died in 1983 at age 19. He was a pilot and sophomore aeronautical engineering student at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California.

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WHY STUDY HUMAN RELATIONS?

Many feel that a study of human relations is unnecessary for the Christian, possibly because it may smack of artificiality or the use of methods to trick people into doing the things we wish them to do. But dare we be unconcerned about unsatisfactory human relationships? Jesus sets forth love, which usually, if not always, results in good human relations, as the very test of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."¹ Whatever your profession, no person has pure love to God unless he or she has unselfish love for fellow humans. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously.

NO WRONG IN BEING LIKED

Though genuine goodness does not always beget the love of your fellow human beings, it is certainly right that we do all we can, without sacrificing principle, to increase "in favor with God *and* man."² "Especially should those who have tasted the love of Christ develop their social powers, for in this way they may win souls to the Saviour."³

No, the study of human relations is not wrong, but right. Its proper consideration will lead us closer to Christ, and indeed prove to be a study of the Ten Commandments in all their breadth.

J. C. Penney, the department-store magnate, said, "From the very beginning of my business career, more than half a century ago, I found that employee-employer relations based on Christian principles are harmonious and profitable. While I do not profess to have practiced them to perfection, my experience teaches me that when both employer and employee are motivated by a desire to observe Christian principles honestly, difficulties and problems are easily solved."

If human relations has to do with the observing of Christian principles in business, how much more is this true in the work of the church! Surely it is important that we study this subject.

GETTING ALONG

Some individuals congratulate themselves that they have no trouble getting along well with people generally, but there are *certain* ones with whom they cannot associate without having a quarrel. In effect this is putting the blame on the other person rather than yourself. If *she* were different, you could get along with her. R. R. Bietz once said, "To say you can't get along with someone is a sign of self-centeredness." Most of us never have "people problems" until we are with people who are *not* making an effort to get along with us. We often leave the "getting along" to the other person, and, if things don't go well, we don't like to think the fault could be with us.

NO ISLANDS

"God has invested man with an influence that makes it impossible for him to live to himself. Individually we are connected with our fellowmen, a part of God's great whole, and we stand under mutual obligations."⁴ No man is an island. We cannot, nor should we desire to, escape people in this world; so each of us must come to grips with our people problems and handle them as Christ would.

This book does not profess to be an exhaustive study of problems in human relations and the reasons for their existence. The comments, quotations, and illustrations used are intended to guide you into profitable reflections upon your own "people problems," which may fall into some of the categories suggested. May you see in the discussion of each problem a call to prayer and a fuller consecration to Him who longs to dwell within us. God can make our every contact with our fellow mortals a mutual stepping-stone to a happier life here and eternal life at last.

John Kerbs.

LOVE EVERYBODY?

Trying to go to sleep one night in an already overcrowded, smoke-filled compartment on the train, I was much annoyed when the sixth man stumbled through the door smelling strongly of liquor. I was disgusted and felt he should sleep elsewhere if he insisted on drinking. I must confess I felt like telling him so and thought of asking the conductor to remove him.

No, it's not wrong to hate the smell of liquor, but I was having difficulty remembering this liquor was not in a bottle but in a child of God, a candidate for His kingdom. Finding it hard to separate the liquor from the man, I was inclined to cast both out.

God was not long in bringing me to repentance. The night was not pleasant, but I determined to do what I could to help this man. The next day, when we were alone, we had a long talk. He wept as he told of starting to drink only seven years before, of how he had lost family and job as a result. Now he was on his way to Johannesburg to seek help at a hospital for alcoholics. A man needing help—even *seeking* help—and I would have cast him out of my presence!

To add to the needed rebuke, only days after arriving in Johannesburg I received a letter which began thus: "Dear Mr. Kerbs: Many thanks for your kindness to my son on the train." The son of a praying, worrying mother! And I, who claimed to be *seeking* the lost, was almost unready to help him whom God had brought to me!

"To bend every energy toward some apparently great work, while we neglect the needy or turn the stranger from his right, is not a service that will meet His approval."¹

MUST I LIKE EVERYONE?

Christlike human relations must take in the whole world. Will Rogers, much-loved American humorist, said, “I never met a man I didn’t like.” If an actor and humorist could say this, how much more should we, who claim to represent Him who “so loved the world,” be able to love everyone! This is possible. As we recognize our own imperfections—and we will more and more as we draw closer to Christ—we will not dislike others because of their faults. As we dwell upon the good in people—and there is some good in everyone (even a stopped clock tells the correct time twice each day!)—making allowances for each individual’s peculiar heredity and environment, we can genuinely, from the heart, like everyone.

A Christian wife, after having spent many years with an imperfect husband—which all husbands are—declared that she loved him “for his faults.” This was a bit difficult for me to understand when I heard it years ago. But is it not true that with the mind of Christ² whose “grace did much more abound” “where sin abounded,”³ we can come to have much affection for the person who is most faulty? Will we not find our hearts going out in a special way toward those who are most in need of love and understanding, patience and gentleness?

A MODERN MAGDALENE

Again on the train, a young woman made herself too available to the men in my compartment. A Mary Magdalene? This she made clear. What would be my reaction? The important question in this case was not concerned with our oftentimes too narrow definition of “morality.” God had a finer lesson to teach me. The question soon became clear: “Will this man, this minister, who claims to be living the life of Christ, be able to reject sin *without rejecting the sinner*?” Oh, how easy it is to confuse the two and treat both sin and sinner with similar contempt!

After she learned that I was a minister, and after I read a portion of Scripture aloud, she expressed her own belief in

God. There followed a beautiful testimony of how she at the point of death had reached up and grasped the hand of God. This “sickness” had been from a self-inflicted bullet wound, one of several attempts at suicide. Her wrists were badly scarred. She sadly related the story of her impending divorce, of four nervous breakdowns, of two lovely children whom she longed for but was not permitted to keep because of her nervous condition. Though convinced that no one in this world really cared for her, she did not question the goodness of God. She wept as I prayed, and expressed gratitude for my promise to pray for her daily.

Yes, a sinner, trying to satisfy a longing for love, but nonetheless a child of God in need of help, a baby girl who had slipped from mother’s arms and gone astray.

“Many have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, whom one word of kindly cheer and courage would have strengthened to overcome. . . . Never lose an opportunity to say a word to encourage and inspire hope. We cannot tell how far-reaching may be our tender words of kindness, our Christlike efforts to lighten some burden. The erring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love.”⁴

A REWARDING EXPERIMENT

A nurse earned the nickname “Gillette” because of her cutting words, her sharp tongue. Mr. Potter, an eighty-one-year-old patient, though a very peaceable gentleman, confessed that even he smarted a bit under her treatment.

He debated the matter silently for some time and decided that perhaps there was a kindlier facet to her nature, if only one could discover it.

So Mr. Potter set out to make the discovery. He met her with a smile the next morning and asked if he had offended her in any way. She stood rigidly by his bedside frowning deeply while he offered to apologize and make amends.

His experiment was more than successful. Even he was surprised when suddenly she flung her arms about his neck and said in broken voice, “No, my dear, you have been a perfect gentleman. I have great respect for you. I know I am crabby at times and have treated you badly, but you’ve never retaliated like the others!”

Mr. Potter concludes, “You can’t judge the marmalade by the label on the jar,” and affirms that “Gillette and old Potter lived happily ever afterward!”

In mastering the fine art of human relations, we must have no misgivings in regard to the goal of loving all people—the lovely with the unlovely, the proud with the humble, the sinner with the saint. Yes, and those of another race with those of our own. The heathen with the Christian, another’s children with ours, the vile with the pure, the rich *and* poor, the ignorant *and* the educated.

“Our Redeemer thirsts for recognition.” And so do all His earthly children. “He hungers for the sympathy and love of those whom He has purchased with His own blood.” Is it then always pride and self-centeredness in ourselves and others that cause us to also thirst for a recognition of our true worth and to hunger for sympathy and love from our fellow pilgrims on earth?⁵

CHRIST IS THE ANSWER

To put on courtesy and sweetness when we choose to can never substitute for “putting on Christ.” Christ is rather to be “put in” than “put on” like a garment. He actually dwells within, and when He does there is little need for pretense. “The impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within.”⁶ “When obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.”⁷ To have the right kind of relations with our fellow humans we must have the experience of the apostle Paul to which he referred when he said, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” When we have this experience we will love everybody.

Key **HATE THE SIN, BUT LOVE THE SINNER.**

TELL IT LIKE IT IS?

“I’m afraid you’re wrong there; when people are dead they’re dead. They are simply dust and don’t know anything.” True though these words may be, they could hardly be expected to win the friendship and confidence of one who consoles himself with the thought that his loved one is in the better world.

“Your Sunday is no better than any workday. You might just as well rest on Tuesday!” This may be truth which the meticulous Sunday keeper should know, but when it is presented in this way the response will doubtless be unfavorable.

It is not always necessary or even desirable to tell people all you know, even of that which is good, right and true. Some people seem to believe that it’s safe to speak if you speak the truth. But the person who follows the example of Christ will realize that there is a time to be silent even when there burns within his heart a message from heaven.

Ponder well this helpful counsel given to medical workers. Surely it applies to all workers for God. “In your work for the patients, do not allow them to receive an impression that you are intensely anxious for them to understand and to accept our faith. It is natural that there should be an intense fervency to this end. But often a wise restraint is necessary. In some cases the words that might seem appropriate would do grave injury, and close a door that might have opened wider.

“Manifest tender love, and exercise judicious forbearance. If you see a good opportunity to make a sharp point in argument, it is better often to forbear.”¹

Have you had the temptation to “tie someone in knots” when he argues, but reveals a serious lack of knowledge? We all have, I suppose, and most of us have yielded to this temptation at some time.

I met Mr. M_____ on the train. He had problems. Tears flowed as we prayed together. The fact that he agreed to prayer and subsequently shared with me his views on religion showed that I was gaining ground. I wasn't satisfied. His views were so unscriptural that I simply had to "straighten him out." I thought I was kind in my contradiction, but suddenly he turned on me in near anger: "I don't care to discuss this further! I never discuss religion or politics."

Apologies were made and we parted on friendly terms, but to some degree my overeagerness to prove a point had closed a door which might have opened wider.

WISE RESTRAINT

"Do not on all occasions present the strongest proofs you know; for this would arouse a suspicion that you were trying merely to convert your hearer to the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

"The simple Word of God has great power to convince of the truth. Let the Word speak and do its work. Let there be wise restraint in evangelistic effort. Do not force the presentation of a testing point. *Wait till inquiries are made.* Let your example teach. Let the words and works show that you believe the words of the living Teacher. (Emphasis added)"²

VIRTUE OR VICE

Frankness is one of those characteristics which may be either virtue or vice. While forever "beating around the bush" may be one extreme, giving to everyone the straight truth may be the other.

"There are conscientious persons who think it their duty to talk freely upon points of faith on which there is a difference of opinion, in a manner which arouses the combativeness of those with whom they converse. One such premature, injudicious effort may close the ears of one who otherwise would have heard patiently, but who will now influence others unfavorably. Thus spring up the roots of bitterness, whereby many are

defiled. Through the indiscretion of one, the ears and hearts of many may be closed to the truth.”³

NOT WORDS, BUT DEEDS

“All you ever talk about is the Sabbath,” said an interested person. A rather extravagant charge? Possibly, but some of us do forget that there are some arguments for our faith more convincing than Sabbath texts.

“In times past some in the sanitarium have felt it their duty to introduce the Sabbath question in all places. They have urged it upon the patients with earnestness and persistency. To such the angels of God would say, Not *words*, but *deeds*. The daily life tells much more than any number of words. A uniform cheerfulness, tender kindness, Christian benevolence, patience, and love will melt away prejudice, and open the heart to the reception of the truth. Few understand the power of these precious influences.”⁴

It may come as a surprise to some that we are not to give people the impression that we are anxious for them to become Seventh-day Adventists—to accept our faith. Did you notice in the statements above that even the presentation of the truth—that which is holy, just and good—can “do grave injury and close a door” if such presentation is made at the wrong time?

Let us never adopt the apparent belief of some who call at our doors. They seem to think a “straight from the shoulder” presentation of the gospel to anyone, anytime, anywhere is all that is necessary to leave their hearers “without excuse.” Jesus timed His words carefully, realizing that there were times when His hour had not yet come. Let us do likewise.

OBNOXIOUSLY ACCURATE

It is also unwise to be “too right” in your contacts with those near to you. Have you been embarrassed and uncomfortable when your guest incessantly interrupted and corrected minor details in his wife’s stories? Have you noticed her give him an icy stare or clam up? “He’ll really get it when they get home!”

I've sometimes thought. Incidentally, I've been on the "getting" end once or twice myself! Have you?

Don't be so accurate that you are obnoxious. Don't interrupt and correct someone when he says "five miles" when you know the correct distance is six miles, or when he says "twenty pounds" and you know the exact figure is eighteen. After all, a story is a story, and minor inaccuracies do not constitute a lie. I believe I recall reading that someone accused Ellen White of being a false prophet because she referred to a forty-bed hospital which in reality had only thirty-nine!

If you are branded a stickler for detail, this may be a more dubious compliment than you realize.

Resist the urge to straighten people out, if there is no real principle at stake.

Key	<i>BE CAREFUL—EVEN WHEN YOU KNOW YOU ARE RIGHT.</i>
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