

GIVE IS A BREAK!

A CHRISTIAN GUIDE TO PERSONALITY TRAITS

TEACHINGS ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR NEGATIVE TRAITS

(Note to reader: This is the draft of the beginning of a series. Sometimes it is not symmetrical – i.e. some of them have more about personality types at the end and some have nothing about types – and there are other incomplete aspects but it still seems important to put up here because the series is benefiting classes and individuals.)

Acceptance of Limitations vs. Perfectionism

Balanced vs. Addicted

Calm vs. Hysterical

Caring vs. Self-Centered

Charitable vs. Indifferent

Convivial vs. Abrupt

Decisive vs. Indecisive

Enjoying vs. Complaining

Enthusiastic vs. Apathetic

Forgiving vs. Unforgiving

Gentle vs. Rough

Humble Realism vs. Grandiosity

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Self-Confidence vs. Envy

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Warm vs. Cold

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Acceptance of Limitations vs. Perfectionism

“Only God is good.”

“I’m a failure.” How often do we hear these words from the mouths of people who are doing okay, but want to attain greater heights of success? An average passing student feels like a failure. A worker earning enough for basic needs can feel like a failure for not having desired luxuries. Parents sometimes feels like failures if their children aren’t exceptional in worldly terms. A dinner party is deemed a failure because of one missing ingredient in the main dish.

Perfectionism is a good word for the way some of us build up expectations for ourselves and others that are almost impossible to attain. Some counselors help their clients to lower their expectations so they can accept more realistic levels of success. After all, in baseball if a player got a base-hit even half of the time, he would have a .500 batting average. It is never achieved! So being an average student, worker, or parent should not lead to a sense of overwhelming failure, but a satisfying sense of accomplishment.

In Christian spirituality, there is an intriguing expression: humility of reality. What it means is not mediocrity, but acceptance of limitations. The goal of our lives should be growth in love, which is limitless, given God’s grace. All other goals need to be subordinate to that one. It is part of trying to be loving to go to school to gain knowledge of useful subjects, but that does not require an “A” average. It is part of trying to be loving to earn money to support oneself and/or your family, but that does not require becoming rich. It is loving to bring up your children well, but that does not mean that they will become important in the world. It is loving to share specially cooked food with family and friends, but that doesn’t require a perfect dinner. ADD anecdote His blood never failed me.

Another bad side of perfectionism is when because we know we can’t do something perfectly or even very well, we fail to even try. Some couples live together in immoral sex for years for fear their marriage would not be ideal. G. K. Chesterton taught “if anything is worth doing it is worth doing badly.” Another useful adage is “the perfect is the enemy of the good.” Instead of doing good things fairly well, in some areas we do nothing, since we can’t do it perfectly!

Can you detect perfectionism in your estimates of failure about any parts of your life? How would a greater emphasis on the Christian value of love above worldly success change your attitude toward yourself and others?

Creator God, You willed to bring beings into the world with lesser intelligence and ability than Yourself. You want us to prepare for an eternity of love by valuing service above fame and/or fortune. Help us to be able to laugh at the unrealistic

standards of the world and rejoice, instead, in little deeds of love accomplished with Your help.

Balanced vs. Addictive

“But I will not be enslaved to anything.” (1 Corinthians 6: 12)

In times past the word “addict” was used exclusively for enslavement to illegal drugs. Nowadays the concept of addiction has been broadened to include a spectrum including alcoholism, nicotine addiction, workaholism, gambling, over-eating, sexaholism, shopping addiction, co-dependency, and computer game mania. The dictionary definition of addiction corresponds to this range: to devote or to surrender oneself to something habitually or obsessively. By contrast, a balanced person enjoys the whatever pleasures life affords, within moral boundaries, but not to an extreme or in such a way as to hurt self or others.

The word “surrender” characterizes addictive enslavement from simply interest or enjoyment. We do not consider ourselves or others to be addicts because we enjoy a drink every day, smoke a few cigarettes, eat with greater gusto than others, work hard, play cards, enjoy sexual pleasure in a moral manner, or play games on the computer an hour a day.

Many psychologists point to one single factor underlying all addictions: pain in the heart so hard to bear that we flee, trying to find solace in the pleasurable or numbing effects of the addiction. How so? Drugs and drink are sought by many for a state of relative oblivion. Over-eating gives a physical sensation of abundant well-being, Nicotine and casual compulsive sex provide pleasure and also a momentary release from tension. The risks of gambling can be an escape into fantasies of wealth without the usual hum-drum work required to earn money. Besides the enjoyment of each purchase, acquiring many possessions gives an illusion of success. Games can distract the mind from dealing with the causes of suffering. Filling every waking moment with work leaves no time to go under because of the tragedies of life.

Trying to achieve balance through will-power can be surprisingly ineffective when it comes of obsessive habits. Some Christian therapists try to bring addicts back to the original pain from which they are fleeing. They help us to find Jesus right in the midst of that wound. Twelve step programs help addicts to surrender to God in all the misery of enslavement. Through deep prayer we can then cling to the love of God precisely when the temptation of the addiction seems overwhelming. Even a few moments of postponement of the habitual addiction can be the first step in a growing ability to make balanced choices.

Father God, see me, your child, a slave to addiction. Hold me close. Pour Your love into my wounds. As I reach out to grasp the pseudo-salvation of my preferred addictions, pry open my fingers, and give me trust that you will fill my hands with what is truly good for me.

Calm vs. Hysterical

“...and He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’” (Mark 4: 39-40)

The word hysterical here does not mean what a clinical psychologist might discern about a mental patient, but more the use of the word in ordinary language to indicate out of control expressions of fear.

We expect unmanageable fear in emergencies such as fires, automobile accidents, or sudden deaths in the family. And when we become hysterical under such circumstances we usually ride out the storm and return to a normal emotional state after an appropriate time lapse, or respond gradually to therapy for post-traumatic syndrome. But when we have hysterical symptoms, such as shaking, crying, or extreme interior panic, over relatively small problems, we feel somewhat ashamed. We want someone human, divine, or both to calm us down as soon as possible

Most psychologists tell us that over-reaction of the hysterical type, in relatively trivial matters, always comes because a present event triggers the memory of something in childhood of a drastic nature such as abandonment, the after-effects of abuse, or a terrifying incident. A person who survived a car accident, years afterwards, may shudder and tend toward hysteria when any vehicle approaches near to the car she is driving.

A calm person, by contrast, will often react with amazing efficiency even in risky situations. Calm begets objective judgments about what can be done to help in every situation of life, large or small. , For those who feel hysterical even if they are not really at risk, the decisions of a calm person are experienced as a most welcome form of loving-kindness.

Think of typical situations, not of tragic proportions, where you tend to be either calm or hysterical: past or present. If you are a calm person, thank the Lord for being His instrument to weaker family and friends. If you tend toward over-excitability in certain recurring tense situations, try a prayer like this:

Jesus, take pity on your poor weak child. You know that I am overwhelmed. Even though my over-reaction is irrational, I don’t know how to stop it. Just as You calmed the storm in the sea of Galilee, You can calm me down now, or send me brothers and sisters to be your ministers of peace to me. Help me to stop working up panic, but instead let me breathe in Your love for me. Then, send the Holy Spirit to give me or my advisors good counsel about the problem I am facing.

Caring vs. Self-centered

**“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”
(John 15:13)**

A caring person is one whose love of God shines forth in concern for all those who need him or her. Sometimes such caring flows naturally without effort when our talents or inclinations make us apt instruments of His love. At other time we show our love by being willing to make heavy sacrifices.

It is part of our fallen nature to be self-centered. In a way we have to be. Unless we are totally disabled, we, ourselves, are responsible for taking care of many of our daily survival needs. We don't blame a person for eating or sleeping. We are not to blame for wanting the good things in life whenever we can have these without harm to others or to our own souls.

We think of people as self-centered whose desire to satisfy their own needs makes them care little for those of others. The worst is to victimize others because of sinful needs. Some examples would be carelessly victimizing others through drunk driving. Others enjoy the torture of prisoners. There are those who avoid the sacrifice of bearing a child in the womb and giving the child up for adoption by choosing abortion instead. Sexually abusing others is clearly selfish as is venting anger at the frustrations in life by beating family members. Forgive us and heal us if we have ever committed such sins.

Less extreme examples of self-centeredness would be trying to get the biggest piece of cake at a dinner party, or pushing ahead of a line in a store, ignoring the need of someone for advice because one prefers surfing TV channels or computer games.

Psychologists point to fear as a key underlying motive for self-centeredness. Not having experienced sufficient love as a child, an individual may feel that only pursuing one's own goals is important. Christian moralists would point also to a tendency in our nature simply to be drawn to self-centered pride and passion. Caring can grow for different reasons. Some become more caring when they fall in love; some when becoming parents. Often greater caring comes with a conversion (turning) toward God's love. Deeply believing that one day, God can give us perfect happiness in heaven enables us to loosen our grip on earthly satisfactions.

In what areas do you need to overcome self-centeredness to show more loving care?

Jesus, You laid down Your life on the cross to redeem us from sin and hell and draw us to love and heaven. Please send us grace to overcome self-centeredness that our hearts may be full of concern for our brothers and sisters.

Charitable vs. Indifferent

“Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers...” (3 John 1: 5)

I am using the word charitable in the popular meaning: giving money or time to help needy people not in our own families or circle of close friends. We all know from the global TV and Net that there are in the world many dying of starvation, lack of medical care, or from abortion. We know there are local, national and international groups who can alleviate these needs and who need our money and/or helping hands.

Of course, a really poor person with many family obligations may have no money or time to give to strangers. But what of those of us who simply pile up unneeded possessions and, beyond normal needed recreation, waste time on trivial amusements, sometimes spending 4 hours or more a day playing games?

Some will use the excuse that the so-called needy are really dishonest manipulators or that money given to charities winds up in the pockets of the CEO's organizing them. But can anyone claim that the victims of floods, earthquakes and wars are all thieves? Or that heads of pro-life groups, mostly staffed by volunteers, who reach out to those with options for women with tragic pregnancies, are all keeping most of the donations for themselves? Would anyone think that Sisters and Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Saint-Mother Teresa of Calcutta whose rule forbids them, in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, to have anything better than newspaper for toilet use, are squandering the money that comes in?

If we actually saw a mother holding a starving baby in her arms in front of the store we were entering to buy a sixth sweater or our 50th CD would we easily step over her to buy our luxuries instead of helping that mother get food for herself and her child?

Jesus, you want us to have the joy of one day meeting in heaven all those strangers we have helped with money and/or time. You want to thank us for seeing You in “the distressing disguise” of the poor. Take away the blindness of indifference and may the Holy Spirit help us to find legitimate charities we can help whenever we have time or money.

Convivial vs. Abrupt

“How lovely it is for brethren to dwell in unity.” Psalm 133:01)

Abrupt is a synonym for being short in conversation. Causes vary: busyness, impatience, a desire to be left alone? Examples would be interrupting others, answering with a yes or no instead of with explanations; or when leading a group cutting participants off pre-maturely. If challenged an abrupt person might become defensive. “So and so goes on forever,” “no one else can get a word in edgewise,” or “we’ve heard all that before.” Even if those reasons are often valid, the abruptness can be much more unloving than the unthinking rambling of the long-winded one. Consider that people who are lonely sometimes talk too much.

Gatherings of God’s children should be full of merry banter, sharings, serious deliberation, and prayer. An atmosphere where every word must be justified leads to tension. On the part of the abrupt one, there can be pride, “only what I have to say counts,” or too great a need to control the conversation. When motivated by disdain for others, it can shrivel the soul of the other speaker. One way to develop a sharing in a fruitful way is, instead of muttering I’ll pray for you about this, actually pray aloud with them right away.

By contrast conviviality, comes from a friendly back and forth in speech. The very word “convivial” is derived from “vivial – living, and con – with” It is a sign of the love that should animate all Christians. When another speaks too much the convivial person might politely tell him/her that “I am so interested in what you are telling me, can I call you back or talk to you another time?”

Think of specific people whose company leads you to be often abrupt. Think of situations where you tend to short responses that could be interpreted as dismissive.

Prayer: “Lord, help me to care more about loving conversation than about efficiency at all costs. Help me show love of neighbor by listening even to those who are repetitive. If I am in the company of people I don’t respect or like very much, may my kind response to their words help them to become better.”

DECISIVE VS. INDECISIVE

“The wise of heart I called a man of discernment.” (Proverbs 16:21)

To make decisions with a sense of conviction is characteristic of decisive people. When they are good decisions we are happy that they have been thought out and implemented as quickly as possible. An example would be a policeman rapidly coming to the rescue of accident victims. Of course Hitler and Stalin were also decisive. It would have been better for the world if they had been indecisive!

Many of us suffer from indecisiveness. “On the one hand....but on the other hand...it depends...who knows?” Such uncertainty when it comes to major life issues is justified. A lot is at stake. But indecisiveness about trivial decisions can become almost paralyzing and can be very annoying for those who have to wait on our plans or listen to endless analyses of possible outcomes.

Some psychologists consider indecisiveness as coming from a desire to avoid all discomfort. We want to flee from the little pricks and stings that are side-effects of every choice. Since it is usually almost impossible to measure the amount of discomfort, because the future is unpredictable, we waver miserably between choices. Often the discomfort of indecision is worse than whatever would come with either choice!

From a Christian standpoint we need to recognize that daily unpleasantness is part of life in a fallen world. We are not failures if we make choices that have more bad side-effects than we anticipated. Certainly, we need to pray for help from the Holy Spirit to make decisions that will be loving and that result in the least pain for others. We need to seek the counsel of wise mentors about bigger decisions. Still we cannot guarantee that we will never make mistakes. Since the Passion was incredibly painful, did the Second Person of the Holy Trinity make a mistake to come down to earth?

What are some areas of life where you are decisive? What are areas where you tend to indecisiveness?

Dear God, please liberate me from the fear of suffering myself and causing others to suffer that would make me overly scrupulous about even trivial decisions of daily life. May I experience freedom of spirit in choosing what I think is best. Thank you for the good decisions You have helped me make. Forgive me for any decisions that were contrary to Your will. Help me to rely not on my merits but on Your mercy.

Enjoying vs. Complaining

“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan...”
(Psalm 55:17)

Life is difficult. In Recovery, Inc., anger management participants urge themselves to “expect frustrations every five minutes, you won’t be disappointed.” It is only natural sometimes to feel annoyed and to express it, at least sometimes. I think it is a particular way of expressing annoyance that makes others call us complainers.

There is a Yiddish word for a complainer that sounds just like what it feels like: kvetch – it has a growling muttering tone. “Kvetch” is a name for someone who acts as if his or her burdens are worse than anyone else’s. When I “kvetch” is there an implication that others are to blame for not fixing things so I would be less miserable? Shouldn’t I be trying to find a solution myself?

Some psychologists would say that complaining about relative trifles is a symptom of feeling lonely or unhappy about bigger things. Instead of taking out these feelings on little situations, we may need counseling and prayer so that the Holy Spirit can help us find ways to change our lives.

The best opposite to complaining is gratitude, But, since there is a whole meditation on gratitude later, I will write here about enjoying v. complaining. Contrast the beaming faces of those who enjoy life with the tight, well, kvetchy look of the complainer. I am overwhelmed when I read of political prisoners unjustly confined for years, actually making up jokes to amuse themselves. Trying to eat a burned chicken breast, one person complains about the cook while another sets aside the skin and relishes the juicy meat underneath. Most people complain about a dreary drizzly day; others exult in the unusual and needed rain. Even more importantly, some of us complain bitterly about the faults of those around us, while others enjoy those same individuals, laughing at their flaws as quirks.

Try for just one day to enjoy everything positive to the max, smiling at everything negative.

Dear Creator God, you know how difficult our life on earth is. You do not blame us for disliking all that is unpleasant. You want us to pray for those who make life hard for us. You also want so much for us to offset annoyances with grateful enjoyment of Your many gifts. Help us to savor all that is pleasant in our days.

Enthusiastic vs. Apathetic

“...Striving with all the energy which He mightily inspires within me.” (1 Colossians 1:29)

The right kind of enthusiasm is attractive and catching. Think of cheering crowds at a sports event or an artist excited about a stroke of the brush that turned an

unsatisfying picture into just what he or she wanted it to be, or ecstatic feelings about the beauty of nature. By contrast it is a downer to be in the company of a person whose response to something we are enjoying is just ho-hum. Even more upsetting is when a team member in some endeavor works with a bored expression and only the minimum of energy.

Yet apathy about anything from chores to prayer can seem justified. Since everything this side of heaven can only be partially fulfilling to us, many a person considers apathy to be a kind of acceptable realism. Why build up enthusiasm for what is often boring and disappointing as well. Even our most ecstatic experiences soon move off the radar screen into the past.

Should a Christian be enthusiastic or apathetic? Clearly, it depends. Any kind of enthusiasm about sin is wrong. Glee in watching a successful theft or cheering for the thief in the media can't be Christian. Over-enthusiasm about worldly goods such as greedily gloating over a win in a game or acting as if getting a more luxurious car was the equal of paradise is surely foolish and symptomatic of an individual with shallow values. On the other hand, enthusiasm in performing good work for the family, society, or the Church is a vital part of Christian character. Why? Because life is so full of frustration, ugliness and pain. Only goodness can help alleviate those conditions.

Consider an average day in your life. Now list relatively significant tasks you usually perform such as cooking, eating, cleaning, working, praying, conversing, reading, playing games, going to sleep. Put an E next to those you do MOST OF THE TIME with enthusiasm and an A next to those you do MOST OF THE TIME apathetically. If lots of them fit neither category leave them blank. Now circle those you think you ought to do with greater enthusiasm because you think they are willed by God and good for you whether they are easy or difficult.

Holy Spirit, You long to inspire enthusiasm in us for doing good. You know all the reasons we have to be apathetic. We ask you to overcome those tendencies and enliven us with fresh enthusiasm and energy.

Forgiving vs. Unforgiving

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

All Christians know that Jesus has obliged us with those words to forgive everyone who has hurt us, no matter how badly. Many a time we think we have forgiven others but when we have to come into contact with them again we realize our hearts are closed in bitterness or hate. Perhaps you have noticed that our own sins seem minor to us and forgivable compared to the sins of others. Easy to understand, really. When I am the victim of someone else's sins, it stings. When I hurt someone else they feel the sting, but I don't!

If you have the courage, make a list in writing or in your mind of all those you have hurt from childhood to the present whether purposely or by omission, such as not obeying parents when they had a right to ask you to help in the house, or not giving all you could to the needy. Now make a list of wrongs of others that have hurt you. If you are like me, the lists are about equal!

If your list of wounds is greater than the list of your own sins you are in good company in your forgiveness. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the other saints through the ages certainly sinned never or less and were certainly sinned against more? Would they have been saints if they “couldn’t” forgive?

**Meditate on these lines of Pope Benedict XVI (*Jesus of Nazareth* p. 158-159)
“Forgiveness exacts a price – first of all from the person who forgives. He must overcome within himself the evil done to him; he must, as it were, burn it interiorly and in so doing renew himself...in communion with the One who bore the burdens of us all.” Other images that help would be letting go or dropping the anger into the ocean.**

Oh my Jesus, forgive me my sins. I try to forgive but often I fail. I need a big infusion of love from Your heart if I am to be free of the anger of non-forgiveness. Make my heart like unto Yours. May my forgiveness release my victimizers. May the forgiveness my victims offer to me release me that all of us may be more loving in the future.

Gentle vs. Rough

“But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children.” (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

What a lovable quality gentleness is! Gentle people are soothing. How opposite to those of us who could be described, at least some of the time, as kind of tactless, rough or defensively confronting. If gentleness has its source in sympathy for the difficulties and hurts of others, roughness usually comes from impatient annoyance.

There is a famous hymn by a minstrel, Matt Talbot, called Gentle Woman about our Blessed Mother. Certainly she was also strong to be able to withstand incredible sufferings, but surely the mother of the Lord and of His Church would have to be also filled with gentle tenderness.

If we are called to be gentle with others, do we not also need to be gentle with ourselves? Of course we need to repent with fervor for our sins, but self-flagellating blame of self for every mistake or flaw comes from pride.

Think of roles in life where you have been gentle. Thank Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, for that virtue. Consider the people you can be rough with. Ask the Holy Spirit to melt your heart with forgiving compassion toward them.

Humble Realism vs. Grandiosity

“We exhort you...brethren to...aspire to live quietly.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11)

The word “grand” is a synonym for “great” and means an action, person, or plan that is truly wonderful. However, grandiosity signifies negative affectation of grandeur and can be more simply defined as inflated expectations based on fantastic delusions of greatness.

Toxic forms of grandiosity illustrated in the fantasies of tyrants who sacrifice countless lives in pursuit of utopian societies are often easier to recognize than less over personal forms. Consider unrealistic beliefs in one’s own skills or talents, all the way down to wanting to be praised as the neighbor with the most beautiful rose garden.

The opposite of grandiosity is not low self-esteem or zero-ambition, but rather a humble and realistic appraisal of our gifts, talents and resources. Accurate assessments lead to effective choices. These bring good results without any over-regard to possible praise. Working for the good of others focuses energy not on self-glorification but on the needs of those we serve.

Christians are admonished to avoid subtle forms of pride. We are to be poor in spirit like little children. Even in the case of worthy projects, we are not to imagine that our plan will ‘save the world.’ A spiritual teacher suggests that we dream not “the impossible dream,” but the possible dream. And we must never justify exploitation of others in our attempts to accomplish some goal beyond our reach.

In what areas of life do you dream of succeeding in ways that could be considered grandiose? In what areas of life do you operate with humble realism?

Prayer: Father God, You have distributed talents of all kinds to Your children and want us to use them to build Your kingdom. May the Holy Spirit keep us from unrealistic fantasies. Help us to discern what we are to do and grant success to those works.

Open vs. Reticent

(Scripture about friendship)

Start with more description of reticence. Mention putting down others opinions abruptly. Also some seem cold and seemingly indifferent. Some reticent people were put down as children and told to shut up. Tap[ing ones foot or other body language to keep people away.

Compared to imprudent or exhibitionistic talkativeness, reticent reserve can look pretty good. Why not be silent unless you are sure your contribution will be meaningful? Why blab away pointlessly? Why share your secrets with relative strangers? Behind such justifications for speaking little about yourself may lurk other reasons. If you don't speak much, others will criticize your opinions less. If you don't share much personally, others have less to gossip about. If you keep dark things secret, others have less to judge you for.

There's a price to pay. How close can others become to us if they hardly know our thoughts, feelings, fears and hopes? Without being foolishly indiscrete, we need to be more open if we are to increase our circle of friends.

Think of times when being open gave others a chance to hurt you. Now think of times in friendship where being open led to comfort and intimacy.

Dear Jesus, You opened Yourself to a sometimes indifferent and sometimes despising world. And in the end You wore your Sacred Heart on Your sleeve for any passerby to see. How many of us came to know our God better because of what You revealed of His love in your vulnerable human nature. Help us to forgive those who wounded us when we were weak. Give us courage to risk self-disclosure more often that there may be greater closeness in your Church.

Relation to Personality Types

**Orderly types have problem with abruptness, because we crave closure
Need to pray before all human contacts to realize that love is more important than efficiency.**

Reticent is often the case with quiet introverts – Need to see that love entails openness

Angry people are abrupt in sarcastic ways or interrupting. Introverts more likely to do it with body language, teeth clenched, hands across chest Need to “bear with one another.”

Laid back are upset with conversation if we are interrupting their addiction: games, etc.

Hopeful are usually convivial and open

Melancholic reticent because only have bad thoughts – why share them. Extroverts melancholics are prophets of doom, puddle glums.

Patient vs. Impatient

**“Bring forth fruit with patience.”(Luke 8:15)
Patience as a fruit of the spirit (Galatians)**

“I hate to wait” could be a motto of many of us. The virtue of patience and the flaw of impatience have to do with our relationship to time. In God’s eternal “now” all is simultaneous; that is, there is no waiting because all is there in one timeless present. We find this hard, if not impossible to understand, because we live in time.

We are human creatures, made at a specific moment in history by our God. We live in time, moment by moment moving from past, to present, to future. That often means waiting for what we want. Only if we reach heaven will there be no waiting.

In our broken, sinful, world we often have to wait because of the inefficiency, disorderliness, and sins of others. “They said that they would send the package Fed Ex One Day on Monday. Now it’s Thursday!” “The kids were supposed to clean their rooms before Grandpa came; now he’s at the airport and they’ll never get back from the baseball field in time to fix the place up.” “You said you were going to stop eating sweets, so why are you hiding bags of candy in the basement?”

The impatient person is either irritated or resentful of delays. The patient person realizes that having to wait is often inevitable. Getting what you want is rarely immediate. If others are going to improve, it will not likely be quickly. Patient people endure the discomfort of delay, especially about relatively trivial matters, offering up the annoyance in words such as these: “Jesus, you bore much more horrible crosses than mine. I offer you this little one that you may send down graces on _____.” (See preface: offering up p.)

If you look at the bottom line, impatience is a kind of rebellion against being a creature living in time instead of a God who is timeless. Why couldn’t God have at least made us angels who can fly about quicker than the speed of light? It is as if a pet cat or dog would be irritated and resentful because he or she can’t talk in human language.

What are you most impatient about in your life? When have you gotten the grace to be patient in spite of frustration?

Prayer: Father God, how patient You are with the whole human race. If you were as impatient as we are You probably would have let Noah’s ark and its cargo capsize in shipwreck. As we beg you to be patient with us struggling so slowly with

our faults, give us patience with all the crosses, small and large, we have to endure on our journey, hopefully to a better place!

Add maybe: St. Paul of the Cross Office of Readings p. 1604

“If a man is united inwardly with the Son of the living God, he also bears his likeness outwardly by his continual practice of heroic goodness, and especially through patience reinforced by courage, which does not complain either secretly or in public. Conceal yourselves in Jesus crucified, and hope for nothing except that all men be thoroughly converted to his will.”

Praising vs. Critical

“But who are you that you judge your neighbor?” (James 4:12)

Many of us cringe when we are criticized and beam with joy when we are praised, yet pride ourselves on our critical abilities. How come? Some distinctions are necessary to understand this seeming paradox.

The word “critical” is often used in the positive to mean the ability to discriminate between truth and error, excellent and poor literary style, or to detect phoniness and deception. All of us hope to be considered critical in those ways. We hope that by means of our critical abilities we will be able to improve things.

In the negative, though, a person deemed critical is judged as always finding fault; nit-picking, using the mind as a knife to cut the words or actions of others to pieces. Such criticalness is associated with coldness, harshness, and arrogance. ‘But, but, but,’...a reader might bridle, ‘there is so much in the world that is shoddy, careless, stupid, and evil. How could I not be critical? Wouldn’t it be phony to go around smiling and nodding as if everything were wonderful? And isn’t lots of praise manipulative flattery?’

Granted there is much we cannot praise and that some affirmers are flatterers, but is that a reason to practically ignore all the good and speak only in carping criticism of others?

By contrast, praising others is rightly considered to be a positive trait. How good others feel to be praised for virtues, work well-done, and loving deeds. How good we, ourselves, feel when we affirm others! In praising we dwell in the good. We might be said to be joining in God’s delight in that good.

Besides critical words or affirmations, there are also disparaging thoughts and affirming thoughts. These can fill our minds with discouragement or with gratitude. And, of course, the one we may be most critical of is ourselves, leading to such low feelings we feel sapped of energy for doing good.

Try going through a day and making a tally of your praise vs. criticism in words and thoughts. If the critical list is longer, ponder this prayer:

Dear God, when I become aware of all that is deficient and evil in the world, I want to criticize those responsible. Help me to use the critical faculties You have given me in tandem with plans for bettering things. Never let me concentrate so much on the bad that I cannot joyfully praise everything worthy, thereby encouraging others to persevere in their good works.

RELEASING vs. CONTROLLING

“...that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will.”
(Philemon: 14)

Parenting, managing a work place, teaching or policing, are examples of necessary control. Micro-managing or trying to fix everyone, however, is excessive and inappropriate. Why is it wrong to try to straighten people out? Isn't loving concern a virtue? Yes and no. Wishing others to do what is good is right. The fault lies in trying to override their right to make free decisions.

God, whose judgment is perfect, rarely coerces us. When Eve ate the apple and Adam followed suit, God did not blast the apple out of their hands or reduce the serpent to ashes. At the Passion, God did not annihilate His son's torturers. So why do we think that we have the right to badger others? “Let go, let God,” is a phrase we need to tell ourselves frequently, so that we can release others into the hands of the Lord.

Prayer: Father God, you are the Lord of our lives. I want to release to you each person I try to control. (List each person) I release (name) _____ into Your heart and hands. Forgive me for my controlling habit. If you want to use me to help them, show me a way to plant seeds, not to command but to suggest in a gentle and loving way, usually only when someone asks for advice. Please pour out Your graces on them that they may be ultimately saved.

“Into Your hands I commend my spirit and the spirit of (name)_____”

Respectful vs. Ridiculing

“...whoever says ‘you fool’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.” (Matthew5:22)

For many years when I read or heard the above words of Jesus I would think to

myself, “He’s gotta be kidding! Maybe the word that is translated “fool” is something much worse in Aramaic”? Surely yapping at someone, especially in the family, with a phrase such as “don’t be such an idiot,” couldn’t be a sin!

Spiritual masters claim that when we are free of mortal sin or even temptations to it, then the conscience begins to upbraid us for lesser sins. The analogy is often made to first washing the big stains off a window but then noticing smaller smears.

Right now think of people you would describe as respectful or reverent toward others. Isn’t it relaxing to be with family or friends who never ridicule others, especially not the all important ME. Our defense mechanisms can take a vacation, and we feel open to sharing problems we would never tell someone whose response to our narrative might be sarcastic blame.

Some psychologists analyze respect vs. ridicule and sarcasm in this challenging way. A person with good self-esteem and humble acceptance of his/her own limitations looks for the good in others and draws it out. A person who feels inferior and insecure likes to shift attention from his or her failings by pointing fingers at others. If others are fools then I am smart. If others are beneath contempt then I am on a pedestal. I may be unsuccessful in reaching many of my goals, but when I ridicule others I am admired for my witty remarks.

Try tracking impulses to ridicule and sarcasm and catching yourself before you sin in this way. Can you bring yourself to show respect for the virtues of others even when they are exhibiting their worst qualities? When her husband was making a fool of himself in public, a loving wife I knew used to take his hand. The love conveyed in this gentle touch would often change his mood for the better.

Jesus, since the Scriptures show You sometimes using sarcasm toward Your enemies we know that this can sometimes be right. But usually you are depicted as gentle, compassionate and respectful even to public sinners. Help us to know that we are worthy of respect as the sons and daughters of the Divine King. Basking in the glory of Your love, may be turn to others with true respect.

Secure vs. Insecure

“You will be secure , and will not fear...you will be protected and take your rest in safety.”Job 11: 15-18

The picture of security is a sleeping baby in the arms of a parent. No fear. Just peaceful content. Soon enough bliss changes to anxious cries as some needs must wait or some may never be met on this earth! The feeling that even when things are going well they could change for the worse even about survival has to make us insecure. Add on childhoods where there was abandonment or rejection it is easy to see why many of us suffer from a kind of chronic insecurity. On the other hand

there are situations of relative security such as having loving parents, consistent teachers, a steady job, a good church.

Make two lists – all of your reasons to feel insecure from the past and now, and then a second list of all your reasons to feel secure from the past the present. Since all the human reasons to feel secure (such as love from family, friends, your abilities, assets), could disappear, one can never feel totally secure. This means our security has to be in God, who is eternal and will never disappear

Thank you, Father God, for all the sources of security you have given me in my life, even if they are only for a time. Thank you most, Father God, for your everlasting love. Teach me to hold onto You when I feel insecure so that when I pray I may have the security of a babe in arms.

“Let nothing disturb you....God alone suffices” St. Teresa of Avila

Self-Confidence vs. Envy

“Let us have no...envy of one another.” (Galatians 5: 26)

“Thou shalt not covet...”

Envy is one of the seven deadly sins. Why? Think, for a minute, about the feeling of envy. It is a kind of leaden weight of self-pity mingled, usually, with animosity toward the envied one. Another person has qualities I wish I had: beauty, brilliance, physical strength and agility, fame, fortune, or power. By contrast I may feel ugly, stupid, physically weak, ordinary, poor, or powerless in the game of life.

Even more deeply, an envious person feels unlovable because she or he can't match up to those glittering qualities. A person we wish loved us more, seems to prefer another with a surplus of those attractive features. Naturally, the envious person feels inferior. There may also be anger at God. Why couldn't You have given me more of those gifts? It's not fair!

You might think that those who have many gifts feel self-confident. Rarely the case. The one who comes in second in the beauty contest can feel envious. The smart kid with IQ ten points lower than his brother can feel inferior. One who doesn't quite make the team in spite of ability and practice can feel finished. A famous person can notice his or her ratings dwindling. A person who made millions on the stock market can worry about a depression. The all powerful manager can be envious of a younger associate climbing up the ladder right behind.

Who have you been most envious of among those in your family, school, work, or public figures?

If envy is the wrong response, what might be the right Christian way to think about oneself? Pride in one's gifts and accomplishments is not Christian. We should

realize that life itself and every talent, and even the energy for working hard for goals, is a gift from God. True, the popularity and success that can come from our talents and efforts can be good if used to build the kingdom of love. We can be grateful for them. But those qualities others envy are often negative if used for vanity, luxurious living, or the enjoyment of power. Most of the saints were not beautiful, brilliant, strong, famous, rich or powerful in their life-times. Compare Hitler, at the zenith of his power, to Jesus on the cross! Or the attractiveness of Marilyn Monroe to that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta!

The right kind of self-confidence could be expressed in this prayer: “Father, God, You created me to use my gifts in loving service. I am content with the way I look even if I am not beautiful by media standards, for you can use that to make me approachable. I am content with the mind you gave me since knowing You is the summit of all wisdom. I am thankful for everything my body can do even if it is much less than that of an athlete. Even if You allowed me to suffer with disabilities, my heart is not disabled, but able to love as much as any more agile person can. If I am not famous, I am known to You, whose “eye is on the sparrow.” If I am not rich or powerful, if I follow You, I will one day have all of heaven and the power of immortality in eternal life. With confidence in Your personal love for me, and Your promises, I can admire the gifts others have in profusion. I can pray that those beneficiaries of natural gifts don’t lose the greater supernatural gifts of faith, hope and love.

Trust vs. Fear

“Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18)

When we read accounts in the New Testament of disciples going to martyrdom, we marvel at their fearlessness. Surely imagining being eaten by lions or crucified would justify fear. Yet the martyrs were full of trust that Jesus would help them in their torments and bring them to eternal happiness.

Many are our fears. They range from fear of being late for an appointment, fear of failing examinations, fear for our loved ones in trouble or danger, all the way to fear of terminal illness or fear of violence including, sometimes, that of members of our own households; finally, to fear of eternal punishment.

We are taught that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”(Psalm 111:10) Since we are weak, sinful, creatures subject to all kinds of evils and sufferings, we are called to work out our salvation “in fear and trembling.” (Psalm 2:11) Even small threats to our security or welfare can trigger an immediate sense of fear. This fear can be positive when it causes us to be careful, plan well, and do whatever we can to avoid failure. Trusting in God in such situations helps, but may not remove a certain tremulous weakness.

Just the same, we need to avoid sinking into a quicksand of fear when challenged by situations we cannot control. We need to beg God to give us trust in His perfect love; in His provident care, even when results are disappointing or tragic. In the end, even if the worst things happen on earth, what matters most is our salvation and the salvation of those we love. We believe that God loves us and them even more than we do. When our fear becomes tortuous, we need to cast ourselves in prayer into His loving heart.

Even if it is painful, make a list of your worst fears. Then bring each one of them to Jesus and ask Him to quiet your soul.

Prayer: Jesus I believe You are my Savior. Let me know more of Your perfect love that my trust may be greater than my fears.

Warm vs. Cold

“Love one another, even as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

Can you imagine anyone in Nazareth finding Jesus, or Mary, or Joseph cold? Why people pushed their way through crowds to touch Jesus; judging from her apparitions Mary, refuge of sinners, must have been encircled by townsfolk looking for love and guidance. And are the artists not right in picturing St. Joseph so often holding the boy Jesus on his shoulders?

Very outward-going people sometimes think of anyone who is quiet as cold. That is not fair. A smile, affection when needed, and little deeds of love prove the warmth of many an inward person. Background also has to be taken into consideration when making judgments about warm vs. cold. In some cultures warmth is shown by ready hugging; in others that would be taboo.

Yet, some of us whether extrovert or introvert are sometimes accused of being cold, at least to some people, at some times, and even to spouses, family members, or other parishioners. Reasons for seeming cold could vary from legitimate grievances all the way down to just indifference.

Psychologists would think first of role-modeling in the family of our birth: a cold father or mother or both. Selfish reasons might be as simple as trying to be inapproachable to avoid getting involved in the knotty problems of others or being asked to perform annoying chores.

Feeling courageous? How about asking the people who have to be with you a lot whether you ever seem cold to them and in what way. You might be surprised. A dedicated very sacrificial priest once read in an evaluation: “you seem cold to us because the door to your office is always closed.” Once aware, he changed that quickly. A grown daughter charged her mother with being a little cold because her Mom’s hugs were so quick. That changed fast!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we want to be like you. Please grace us with the warmth of your hearts; heal us of any coldness from others in the past that closed us up; let us be a warm haven for all who need our love.

Zealous vs. Lax

“Preach the word, persevere in the task, both when convenient and inconvenient, correct, reprove, summon to obedience, but do all with patience and sound doctrine.” 2 Timothy 4:2

Consider this spectrum of stances for those in leadership roles (parents, teachers, or preachers), regarding exhorting others about the true and the good:

- 1) rageful browbeating of those thought to be in error or sin;**
- 2) self-righteous scolding of those thought to be in error or sin;**
- 3) an explanation of what is true and good, done with love and patience to those thought to be in error or sin;**
- 4) scant mention of difficult areas in morality due to fear of hurting or annoying others**

A Christian exhibits the positive meaning of the virtue of zeal who is zealous in a good way, full of energy for preaching or teaching the true and the good (#3), without any rage, bitterness, or self-righteousness (see forthcoming lesson on self-righteousness)

If you didn't like my suggestion (and that's okay with me, btw...) perhaps something more like this(a small bit of punctuation would keep it the way you have it and make it sound much less awkward (comma after continue seems to do the trick for me, now that I re-read it...what do you think?))

For many centuries leaders carried out their roles with rage or brow-beating (consider the literal meaning of this word), and frequently in a scolding, or shaming, tone of voice. From the second half of the 20th century on, there has been a reaction against this unchristian and damaging way of parenting, teaching and preaching. I believe that some over-reacted in the form of #4. Of course, no Christian should be harsh, but kindness should not lead to laxity either. The sad result of laxity

is that many continue, in error and sin, to rationalize their ideas and behavior. The pluralism and tolerance of the oft cited “everyone is doing it,” excuse, rules out any authoritative teaching or obedience.

In the New Testament Jesus is rarely furious, but admonishes sin and even

threatens hell to those who are unrepentant deems or incorrigible. These threats are not only against Pharisaical self-righteousness and worldly greed but also against sins of lust.

In what areas are you Christian in your zeal? Identify areas in which you have been harsh in your zealousness, both now in the past. Are there areas in which you have you been or are you now overly tolerant?

Prayer: Jesus, Lord and Savior, how Your Sacred Heart bleeds when You see Your children victimized by bitter zeal, wounded by shaming, or even tempted by these things to rebel! But, how Your Sacred Heart must also bleed when You see Your children become prey for the wolves due to lack of forceful but loving leadership. Help us to avoid either extreme, as, we strive to “speak the truth with love,” “in season, out of season.”

