

# SWEET AND BITTER

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Do you prefer sweet food or sour food? Most will agree that sweet is better.

But what about sweet-and-sour pork (or chicken or shrimp)? Doesn't the expert blend of sugar and vinegar achieve a unique and delicious flavor?

So, it's not always "either-or." Sometimes, "both-and" is good.

How about kettle corn? Nothing brings out the sweetness like a little salt. Right? Some people salt their watermelon for a similar effect.

Subject of relationships is always bittersweet.

Sweet because it stirs up hoped-for images of romance or intimate friendship.

Bitter because it stirs up memories of failed or less-than-ideal relationships.

Sweet because it promises happiness.

Bitter because it promises pain.

Some people prefer to simply avoid relationships; too much drama.

Few, if any, can actually achieve that; too much loneliness.

And somehow all of those wins and losses translate to the relationship with God that Jesus promises.

Concerning the Gospel: It sounds good. It sounds hopeful. Some Christians look really happy.

But others look really sour. Some are bitter and mean. Others are lonely and needy. Kind of shakes the "hopeful" part.

What kind of Christian would people say you are? And what does that suggest about your relationship with God Himself?

Can anyone have a good relationship with God, but a bad relationship with people?

Can anyone have a bad relationship with God, but a good relationship with people?

1 John 4

*<sup>20</sup> If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.*

The trouble is, God is perfect; He never fails or lets us down. So, if that relationship is faltering, who's responsible? Does that make it a perpetual bummer, always being on the short end of the stick? Would that discourage some people from even trying?

Why do we feel lonely, when God says He will never leave us?

A father was awakened by the crying of his young son, who had been awakened by a nightmare. He went to his bedroom to comfort him. After they prayed, the boy seemed at peace, so the dad rose to return to his own bed.

But the little boy complained, “Dad, can’t you stay here with me?”

Dad replied, “Son, Jesus is here with you. You’ll be just fine.”

“Dad, I know Jesus is with me always,” he protested, “but right now I need someone with skin on.”

Relationship with Jesus doesn’t *replace* the need for human relationships, but it promises to enhance them.

Of course, whether we admit it or not, we all have carried around in our hearts a wishlist.

You know, if you do much online shopping, how the businesses with a large online presence always offer a wishlist feature. This allows you to save information on a product you like but are not yet ready to purchase. They know that if you store information in the wishlist, you’ll check it repeatedly, and the more often you see the desired product, the more likely you are to actually purchase it. It works for you and it works for them.

So, how many of you have ever carried in your heart or mind a relationship wishlist? A place where you stored ideals you hoped to find or memories of feelings that you want repeated in your “most desired” relationship.

Some have gone so far as to create a written list of attributes and qualities that “Mister Right” or “Miss Right” needs to have in order to be pass muster. Then the real contest begins—what we call “dating.” It’s like your own personal “American Idol” competition. Just one judge, and the prize is *me!*

Alas, we can dream up more desirable qualities than any human could possibly bear. The result? You become Simon Cowell and you’re never satisfied. Your future bears the title, “spinster.”

What are you doing to make *yourself* more desirable? Clothes? Jewelry? Cosmetics? Surgery?

What about Biblical beauty aids?

Proverbs 31 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> *Who can find a virtuous and capable wife?*

*She is more precious than rubies.*

<sup>11</sup> *Her husband can trust her,  
and she will greatly enrich his life.*

<sup>12</sup> *She brings him good, not harm,  
all the days of her life.*

<sup>13</sup> *She finds wool and flax  
and busily spins it.*

<sup>14</sup> *She is like a merchant’s ship,  
bringing her food from afar.*

<sup>15</sup> *She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household  
and plan the day’s work for her servant girls.*

<sup>16</sup> *She goes to inspect a field and buys it;  
with her earnings she plants a vineyard.*

<sup>17</sup> *She is energetic and strong,  
a hard worker.*

<sup>18</sup> *She makes sure her dealings are profitable;  
her lamp burns late into the night.*

<sup>19</sup> *Her hands are busy spinning thread,  
her fingers twisting fiber.*

<sup>20</sup> *She extends a helping hand to the poor  
and opens her arms to the needy.*

<sup>21</sup> *She has no fear of winter for her household,  
for everyone has warm clothes.*

<sup>22</sup> *She makes her own bedspreads.  
She dresses in fine linen and purple gowns.*

<sup>23</sup> *Her husband is well known at the city gates,  
where he sits with the other civic leaders.*

<sup>24</sup> *She makes belted linen garments  
and sashes to sell to the merchants.*

<sup>25</sup> *She is clothed with strength and dignity,  
and she laughs without fear of the future.*

<sup>26</sup> *When she speaks, her words are wise,  
and she gives instructions with kindness.*

<sup>27</sup> *She carefully watches everything in her household  
and suffers nothing from laziness.*

<sup>28</sup> *Her children stand and bless her.  
Her husband praises her:*

<sup>29</sup> *"There are many virtuous and capable women in the world,  
but you surpass them all!"*

<sup>30</sup> *Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last;  
but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised.*

<sup>31</sup> *Reward her for all she has done.  
Let her deeds publicly declare her praise.*

Though referring to a woman, the proverbial principles of qualities that attract may apply to either gender. Then there is Paul's list of the captivating fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5 (NLT)

<sup>22</sup> *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control.*

And if you think getting into relationships is difficult, think about this: Whatever it takes to catch your prey is what it will take to keep your catch.

Relationships, at best, require persistent work. They definitely beat out being alone, and they offer lots of amazing perks, but they require effort. Repeatedly.

Why is it that some things that require repetition seem "normal," while other things irk us?

It seems normal to feed ourselves every day. Several times a day.

The Bible says that some people are so lazy that don't even want to lift their hand to their mouth to feed themselves. I believe what the Bible says, but I have *never* met a person that lazy. On the contrary, I'd say that most people consider that routine their daily exercise program, and the more reps the better.

Speaking of "reps," why does daily exercise elude so many of us? Why do we find it so annoying that we must do it again today?

Or Bible reading... why is it so hard to be consistent with our reading plan?

Or vacuuming... didn't I do this just last week?

Or maintaining your equipment... why don't they just make things to last?

Or dishwashing... some people seem to think that the signal to wash dishes is the watering eyes and nasal burn caused by the fumes from the rancid remains of last week's dinners. Or the simple fact that there are no more clean dishes left anywhere in the house.

Or putting love into our relationships... Yes, putting it *in*. Everyone wants to get love *out* of their relationships, but chafe at the thought that sometimes they must put love in first.

This why Jesus said, "You have left your first love."

Revelation 2 (NJB)

<sup>4</sup> *But I have this against you: you have lost the love you had at first.* <sup>5</sup> *Therefore, remember where you were before you fell, turn from this sin, and do what you used to do before. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—if you don't turn from your sin!*

Something about "first love" causes us to brave the work week with gusto, tackling each task with the hope of that kiss of gratitude, or that hug of appreciation, or that pat on the back, or, at least, that "Good job."

Remember. Repent. Return. Do the first works over again. That's how you replenish love's fire.

Ephesians 5

<sup>1</sup> *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children* <sup>2</sup> *and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

The first works are also the everyday works. Don't be distracted. It's worth your effort. Keep on keepin' on.

Live a life of love. With God and with people.