Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Matthew 18:21

Keeping your sanity in a mad, mad world is an ongoing challenge. The solution isn’t through medication, or meditation—though, on occasion, both may help. In this series of commentaries, I’ve give you some steps or guidelines that will let you keep your sanity no matter what happens in our mad, mad world.

I’ve suggested the following guidelines: 1. Keep your perspective. 2. Have a purpose in life. 3. Don’t worry about what you cannot change. 4. Keep your focus. And on this edition of Guidelines, I’ll give you another one, a very important key to keeping your sanity in a mad, mad world.

Guideline #5: Keep your relationships right. “Ah,” you may now say, “you’re getting rather personal.” Correct! Nothing drives you crazy faster than conflict, than fighting with your husband or wife, than standing toe to toe and verbally slugging it out with your teenager. “My kids are driving me crazy,” I occasionally hear from a distraught mother, and the reality is that she’s right.

Relationships are the glue that keep our lives intact, and when they unravel, we lose everything. Your money, your experience, your position matter little when you lose the one you love—whether it is your mate, your date, or your kids.

An elderly gentleman needed surgery, and his son-in-law, a well qualified surgeon, was asked by the very sick man, to do the operation. Before he went under anesthesia, the man wanted a word with his son-in-law. “OK, son,” he said. “I know this is a tough one and I may not come through. Do your best,” and remember, if I die, your mother-in-law is coming to live with you!”

How do you keep relationships right? The following five principles work.

1. Confront lovingly. How you do it makes the difference. Jesus taught that when you are offended, you need to confront the individual and voice your concern (Matthew 18:15). You can choose the time, the manner, and the place of your confrontation, and you can do it without hostility in a gentle, want-to-get-this-resolved manner that is positive.

2. Communicate clearly. Don’t lambaste the other, but think through what you are going to say, letting the other know how you feel. When we stuff anger and hostility inside, it sometimes comes out with the torrent of a volcano, and that’s harmful. “I” statements are better than inflammatory accusations. Example: “When you do this, here’s how I feel.”

3. Compromise quickly. Most men think that they must win the argument. “Before we married,” said one wife, “my husband was Mr. Right. But since we married, he is Mr. Always Right. Remember, you can win the argument and lose the love of your life. Negotiation and compromise are far better than winning the argument and losing the one you cherish.

4. Completely forgive, and forgive completely. Forgiveness means you give up your right to hurt the other person because he or she hurt you. Forgiving someone doesn’t imply, “It’s OK that you hurt me.” Rather it means placing the wrong that someone did to you in God’s hands, confident that He can deal with the offended person better than you can. It relieves you of a great responsibility. This also means, once an issue is dealt with, let it go. Refuse to dwell on it. Don’t file the offense away in your memory bank.

5. Concentrate on what’s important. Frankly, nothing will drive you crazy faster than anger, hostility, and plotting revenge. Remember, your goal is to keep the relationship right, and that way you keep your sanity in a mad, mad world.

And there you have it—insights that will work, provided you put them into operation in your personal life.

Resource reading: Matthew 18.