

Help! I'm Struggling With Relationships

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Who we are, in some ways, is the direct result of the relationships we have made.
 - a. During the Civil Rights era two prominent figures arose in the struggle for justice: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.
 - b. MLK, Jr. advocated a non-violent stance toward the race issue where as Malcolm X was more militant in his beliefs.
 - c. Why? Historians have traced the upbringing of both men and the disparities are amazing. Malcolm X grew up in a lower-class home where his father physically abused him and his 7 siblings and but left the family when Malcolm was only 6 years old. To make matters worse his mother was committed to a mental institute when he was only 12 and then the government split the family up between various foster homes.
 - d. MLK, Jr., grew up in a middle-class home where his mother and father were both present throughout his life. He was loved and appreciated and was sheltered from much of the segregation that occurred where he lived in Atlanta, Georgia. He was highly educated and even earned his doctorate from Boston University.
 - e. MLK Jr., said "I have a dream" while Malcolm X stated that "He had a nightmare."
 - f. In part, you could say that the courses of action they took (while more complex than I have mentioned) is the result of the relationships they have had in their upbringing. It was the meat behind their method.
 - g. It's all about relationships.
- II. Think about why you are here this morning. Is it safe to say that most of you are here because of a relationship?
 - a. Maybe your spouse invited you.
 - b. Maybe 45 years ago you studied the Scriptures with your mom or dad and became baptized.
 - c. Perhaps it was a minister who showed special attention to you and as a

result of that relationship you put on Christ in baptism.

- d. But it works negatively...
 - i. Perhaps you have loved ones who have strayed from being a part of the church.
 - ii. They vowed never to come back because, perhaps, they had negative experiences and negative relationships.
- e. Whether we are here this morning or not here, most of it may very well have to do with relationships.

III. I am certain that just about every aspect of the Christian journey has to do with relationships. Consider all of the one another's found in the New Testament...

- a. Love one another (John 13:34)
- b. Forgive one another (Eph. 4:32)
- c. Accepting one another (Rom. 15:7)
- d. Bearing with one another (Eph. 4:2)
- e. Being Devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10)
- f. Honoring one another above ourselves (Rom. 12:10)
- g. Greeting one another (2 Cor. 13:12)
- h. These are just a few examples...there are many more!

IV. With all of that information though we still sometimes get distracted on the journey of life.

- a. Sometimes we do not relate to others because we cannot even relate to ourselves.
- b. Divorce rate is still high, murder, rape, child abuse all are still high.
- c. All of this is a direct result of a disorientation of our relationships and a value on something other than each other.

V. This morning we merely introduce to you a direction to go to. It is not a "one-sermon-fits-all" shot at relationships but simply the door to a room of new possibilities.

VI. Who is this lesson for?

- a. If you struggle with the following relationships this lesson is for you...
 - i. Do you struggle with how to connect with God?
 - ii. Do you struggle with relating to the church?
 - iii. Do you struggle with your spouse or significant other?
 - iv. Do you struggle with your grandchildren?
 - v. Do you struggle with your boss or perhaps the employees who work for you?
 - vi. Students do you struggle with teachers or people at school?
 - vii. Do you struggle with government officials?

- b. In essence, this lesson is for all of us because we all are in relationships.

Let's look at two sets of Scriptures

BODY:

I. Matthew 22:34-40 – A Theology of Relationship

- a. I wonder what the Pharisees were looking for when they asked Jesus about the greatest command.
- b. Matthew records that they asked him in order to “test him”. The word there (*peirazo*) means a testing by trial. The problem is that we are left without an answer as to whether Jesus passed their test. We can look at it years later and proclaim, “Of course he did!” but that does not help us with this context.
- c. Regardless, Jesus says that the most important command, law, statute, ordinance and precept is that they love God with their existence.
- d. In other words, Jesus is quoting the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:5 which most Hebrews hailed as the crux of Torah. The glue that held it all together. The lawyer would have loved this as would the Pharisees.
- e. Fast forward to our present context and it is still our first responsibility to pledge our allegiance to God Almighty.
 - i. This is not 100% fact but when I struggle with one-another relationships it is in part because I am struggling with a relationship with God.
 - ii. How do I have a positive relationship with Him in order to keep my sanity with one-another relationships? I call them kingdom-activities: meditation, study, prayer, fasting, singing, serving, communion and fellowship.
 - iii. More on this to come!
- f. But notice what he says is the second command!
 - i. Love your neighbor as yourself!!!
 - ii. Two things are important from this text.
 - 1. Jesus quotes a portion of Leviticus 19:18. I would like to read the entire context in Leviticus 19:9-18.
 - a. What is this all about? It is about treating people with respect and the way we treat people is, in many ways, a reflection of how we carry the name of the Lord.
 - b. Leviticus 19 was a call to holiness for the people of Israel.
 - c. You find out a lot about people when you hear what

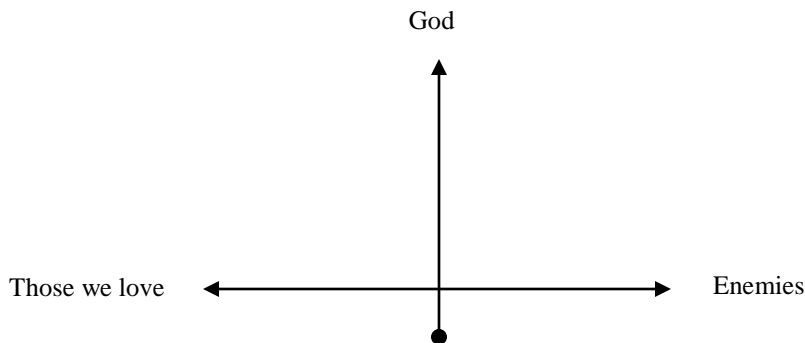
they say behind your back. Just because we walk out of the walls of this building does not negate the fact that we still treat people like we treat God.

- d. How fair is it that we worship God almighty and then walk out and treat people like junk?

- 2. A second important thing from the Leviticus law Jesus quoted is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

- a. Why did Jesus quote this? Perhaps because God in heaven knows that humans are selfish. If you ever want to love someone with your entire being think about how much you love yourself.
- b. BUT...maybe Jesus is on to something here! Perhaps we struggle loving others because we don't even love ourselves.
- c. (Pause)
- d. Our self-image is shattered because of a rough upbringing or a damaged marriage or some broken relationships somewhere.
- e. So why should we love God or others when all we experienced is hurt.
- f. People who cut themselves...etc.
- g. The adage is true: hurt people hurt people.
- h. Perhaps we need to look at ourselves not as broken pieces of trash but as beautiful creations bearing the image of God.

- g. So our theology is basic...we struggle with relationships when our paradigm is distorted.



- i. If we do not love God effectively then it affects our relationships with mankind.
- ii. But, using Leviticus 19 and other passages, if we do not love others completely then it affects our relationship with God.

Having our Theology let's look at a passage as an example of what to do

II. Romans 12:9-21—A Reference Point for Lived Theology

- a. There are many passages of Scripture that speak to living out the Matthew 22 initiative but none are as well-rounded as Romans 12.
- b. In context, Romans 12 is the beginning of a section that tells about righteousness as a benefit of living a new life.
- c. Perhaps Paul is juxtaposing the Christian life in community with the previously mentioned section about Israel.
- d. The Result: the essential ingredients for the recipe of relationships in the kingdom of God.
 - i. It is the corn meal in the corn bread.
 - ii. It is the milk in the milkshake.
 - iii. It is the chocolate in the chocolate thunder from down under.
- e. I chose Romans 12 because it is easy to talk about relationships and to come up with a “what the bible says” about relationships but sometimes it gets extremely difficult when we try to live it out. To illustrate let me propose that in any relationship you turn to Romans 12 and see if you and the other person pass the test. In other words if you are struggling in a relationship look at this text and see if you are doing everything you can.
 - i. Is your love genuine?
 - ii. Is your relationship out of brotherly affection?
 - iii. Are you honoring them above yourselves?
 - iv. Are you seeking the Lord in this relationship?
 - v. Are you constant in prayer? (Have you prayed about it?)
 - vi. Are you hospitable?
 - vii. In regards to enemies?
 1. Are you blessing those who hate you?
 2. Are you abstaining from cursing them?
 - viii. Are you living in harmony?
 - ix. Are you humble and not looking down on people?
 - x. Are you peaceful?
 - xi. Are you doing everything in your power to let the people who hate you the most know that you are serving them?

Conclusion:

- I. All of this stuff is counter-intuitive to American society. But I would rather hail Jesus as king than Caesar, governor or president.
- II. Our struggle in relationships may be due to our struggle with the Lord.
- III. Perhaps now is the time to work on it.