

RELATIONSHIPS - PART 1

INTRO

- Life is relationships...they are woven into the very fabric of our lives
- Imagining life without relationships is nearly impossible because they bring great joy and meaning to our lives
- Most of our most precious and treasured memories are connected in some way to relationships with others
- “It seems nearly impossible to overstate the importance of relationships. Isn’t this the point of the classic *It’s a Wonderful Life*? In the final scene, in a house full of neighbors, with everyone pitching in to help George, his brother Harry arrives to the surprise of the crowd. Everyone gets hushed and Harry lifts his glass to say, ‘A toast to my big brother George, the richest man in town!’ Cheers erupt, and George picks up a copy of *Tom Sawyer*, left by Clarence, the angel. The shot zooms in for us to read the inscription Clarence wrote to George: Remember no man is a failure who has friends! Yes, the movie’s angelology is off, but its message about friendship is spot-on and moving. Life is relationships.”¹
- Life is relationships...and this is even more true in the church where believers are united by the Spirit and put into relationship with one another
- It should come as no surprise that relationships are also foundational to the church
- The church is the place where those God-designed relationships are meant to operate
- The church was not something God invented because all his other plans failed...rather, the church was the culmination of all of God’s plans for his children
- It is where he intends the blessing of relationships to flourish...real people...in real relationships with each other
- The church is a place of fellowship...a place where real body life takes place
- Yet, relationships are hard...some of our greatest pain and sorrow in this life come as a result of relational discord and conflict
- Some of the worst pain in life occurs in the context of broken relationships, when we hurt others and are hurt by them
- They are complex, challenging, messy, and often characterized by struggle and failure
- But our hope as believers is that, in Christ, relationships can be maintained and repaired with the resources God supplies
- They can become deeper and even more meaningful than they were before sin broke them
- “Relationships are messy; they are also what God uses to rescue us from ourselves. Through them, God shows us our inability to love others without first finding our strength in our relationship with the God who created and redeemed us.”²
- Even in the face of less-than-perfect relationships, God is able to help build relationships that become what he intended them to be

¹ <https://thementoringproject.com/field-guides/relationships/>

² Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 1.

THREE CATEGORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS

- When we think of relationships, we normally think of the horizontal ones with other people
- But these horizontal relationships are greatly affected by two other relationships which are really the true starting point when it comes to good relationships
- Often the conflict that erupts in horizontal relationships springs from problems in how we relate to God and ourselves

Our Relationship with God (Upward)

- This is the foundational relationship that we are in as those created in God's image...we are made by him and for him
- Thus, that relationship must be made right and be cultivated daily in order for earthly relationships to flourish
- This happens first by sinners coming to faith in Christ which restores the vertical relationship

Romans 5:6-11 ~ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

- This happens daily as we abide in Christ and walk closely with him

John 15:4-5 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

- Our relationship with God (vertical) greatly impacts how we relate to others (horizontal)
- Jesus made this clear when he was asked about the greatest commandment

Matthew 22:37-39 ~ And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

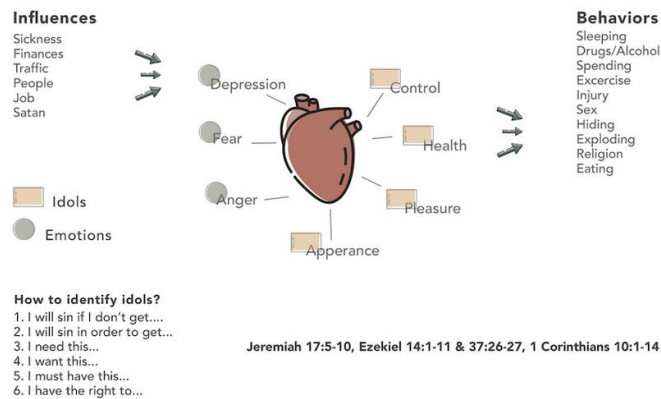
Our Relationship to Ourselves (Inward)

- Knowing ourselves and what is going on in our souls is critical to healthy relationships
- Taking a long hard look into our hearts to see what motives are at work in our relationships must be a regular practice
- Conflict and relational discord usually spring from unmet expectations and idolatrous desires
- Even good things can become selfish desires and can morph into something sinful:³
 - Comfort – I want, must have, and deserve comfort and you'd better not get in the way of me getting it! I fear hard work.
 - Pleasure – I want, must have, and deserve pleasure and you'd better give it to me! I fear pain.
 - Recognition – I want, must have and deserve recognition or I will be devastated. I fear being overlooked.

³ List adapted from Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 76.

- Power – I want, must have, and deserve power and you’d better do what I say! I fear being told what to do.
- Control – I want, must have, and deserve control and you will feel the brunt of my disappointment if you mess up my tidy little universe! I fear unpredictability.
- Acceptance – I want, must have, and deserve acceptance and you are responsible to give it to me. I fear rejection.

IDOLS OF THE HEART



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Our Relationship to Others (Outward)

- Our horizontal relationships are a reflection of our vertical relationship with the Lord and the internal relationship with ourselves
- Human relationships tend to shift back and forth between isolation and immersion
- “We live with this tension between self-protective isolation and the dream for meaningful relationships. Where are you on the continuum right now? Are you moving away from others because of a recent hurt? Are you moving toward others because you have been alone too long? What tendency do you observe in your life? Do you typically move in the direction of isolation or immersion? Do you tend toward independence or codependence? Every relational decision we make is moving in one of these directions. We are tempted to make a relationship either less or more than it should be. Without a biblical model to explain the place relationships should have in your life, you will likely experience imbalance, confusion, conflicting desires, and general frustration... While most of us don’t tend to live at either of these extremes, we do move in the direction of isolation or immersion in all our relationships:

“I want to be safe” (Isolation) ←-----→ “I need you in order to live” (Immersion)

Where we are on the continuum varies with each relationship, but for most of us, our problems tend to cluster on one end of the continuum or the other.”⁵

- This results in 3 possible relational scenarios:⁶
 1. Mutual Frustration – when one wants to move toward isolation and the other toward immersion
 2. Codependence – when both persons move toward immersion; looking for the other person to meet very high relational expectations; easily hurt when the other doesn’t meet their expectations

⁴ <https://www.biblicalcounselingresources.org/work/crystals-cczet-w6d5y>

⁵ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

- 3. Isolation – when both persons move toward isolation in search of safety and self-protection; limited conversations, stay away from revealing too much about their heart; results in empty relationships
- “The interesting point about each profile is that each is an unbalanced relationship because each person tends to make too much or too little of the relationship. Isolationists conclude that relationships are too difficult; they are not necessary and the effort is not worth it. (“I don’t need relationships to be me.”) On the other hand, immersionists are convinced that relationships are everything. (“Without relationships, I am nobody.”) These conclusions are rooted in people’s hearts and expectations. When things go wrong in relationships, the problem often starts there.”⁷
- This is where we need to understand how God relates to the other members of the Trinity and how he relates to us

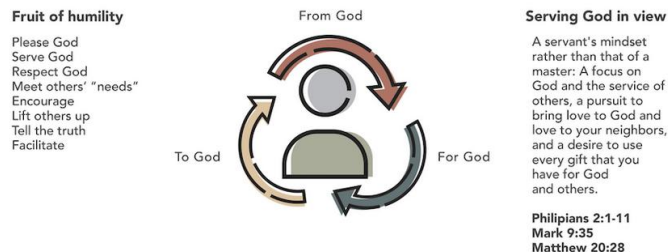
John 17:20-26 ~ I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; **23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.** 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 **and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**

- This is where we also need to live for the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of self...and practice genuine humility toward one another...our relationships must be shaped by what God wants, not us

KINGDOM DIAGRAM



HUMILITY



⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Both diagrams from <https://www.biblicalcounselingresources.org/work/crystals-cczet-w6d5y>

- “Human relationships are most satisfying when we enter them not just to please ourselves or even the other person, but to please God. The circle of human community is only healthy when it exists within the larger circle of community with God.”⁹

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS¹⁰

God Has Created Us for Relationships

- As people who are created in the image of God, we realize that God has made us for relationships
- Even though the term “relationship” doesn’t appear in the Bible, the concept is found all throughout it
- God has not designed us to live alone, in isolation from others...we were created to be social beings
- Being in relationships with others is a foundational part of God’s design for humans
- Humans were created to be in relationships with God and with each other since they were made in God’s image
- Since God lives in relationship within the Trinity, he has designed us to share in similar relationships as those made in his likeness
- We can see this from the very beginning...seven times in Genesis 1, God looked at what he had created and saw that it was good
- But something very interesting happened in Genesis 2...in a perfect and sinless world, where man enjoyed perfect relationship with his Creator, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” a statement that says more about God’s design for humanity than it does about Adam’s need
- The only thing in all of creation that was not good was man’s solitude
- Though perfect, sinless and in perfect harmony with God, humans still needed to be in relationship with other humans
- So, God created woman to be a companion to man and to allow him true relationship
- God created Eve to be a helper to and in relationship with Adam because he is a social, relational God
- In that sense, nothing has changed to this day...the need for relationships remains
- “Just as human beings were created with a vertical need for God’s companionship, they are also created for the horizontal companionship of other people. Genesis 2 points to the fact that relationships are a core component of who God has designed you to be.”¹¹

In a Sense, All Relationships Are Hard

- Sin endangers all fellowship and infects all relationships
- This is evident in the breakdown in relationships in the home, in the church, in society
- Sin and selfishness operate as principles beneath the surface of all relationships
- We only need to look at the very first family to see the reality of this
 - As a result of the fall, the relationship between Adam and Eve became characterized by accusation and slander
 - In Genesis 4, Cain killed Abel out of envy, jealousy, and greed
- And since then, all human relationships have been plagued by the effects of the fall

⁹ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 28.

¹⁰ Adapted from Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 11-16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

- “What we want, for ourselves and from others, becomes more important to us than God himself. We have made ourselves ultimate and God secondary. This Bible calls this sin, as we reject God’s rightful rule over us and decide to become our own ruler. When we do this, our selfish desires go on to rule our relationships, leading to problems, conflict, and disappointment with others.”¹²
- It is tempting to assume that problems in relationships are due to factors outside us (circumstances, others); however, while true that others’ sins do affect us, Scripture is very clear that the problem also lies within us

Romans 7:21-25 ~ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

James 4:1 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

- Sin impacts our relationships in six basic ways:¹³
 1. Self-centeredness – makes us think what’s best for us rather than what God’s doing in us
 2. Self-rule – makes us think others should bow to our control
 3. Self-sufficiency – makes us independent of God rather than dependent on him
 4. Self-righteousness – makes us think we are more righteous than the other person
 5. Self-satisfaction – makes us look to others for happiness rather than God
 6. Self-taught – makes us our own source of truth

There is No Such Thing as a Problem-Free Relationship

- Although we may try a variety of techniques to foster healthy relationships in hopes of avoiding their pitfalls and pain, no relationship is free from problems
- All relationships require hard work, humility, and the power of the Gospel
- “Skills and techniques appeal to us because they promise that relational problems can be fixed by tweaking our behavior without altering the bent of our hearts. But the Bible says something very different. It says Christ is the only real hope for relationships because only he can dig deep enough to address the core motivations and desires of our hearts.”¹⁴

God Keeps Us in Messy Relationships for His Purposes

- Often it’s easy to wonder why God doesn’t just fix our relationships...why he allows conflict to remain
- But God uses the difficult relationships to grow and sanctify us...it’s one of his purposes in relationships
- “What happens in the messiness of relationships is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start coming to the end of ourselves. Only when this happens do we reach out for the help God alone can provide. Weak and needy people finding their hope in Christ’s grace are what mark a mature relationship. The most dangerous aspect of your relationships is not your weakness, but your delusions of strength. Self-reliance is almost always a component of a bad relationship. While we would like to avoid the mess and enjoy deep and intimate community, God says that it is in the very process of working through the mess that intimacy is found.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

God's Word Offers Clear Hope for Our Relationships

- The Gospel provides real and lasting answers for the struggles we face in our interactions with others
- The NT offers hope that unity, love, humility, grace, and forgiveness can characterize our relationships
- “This hope challenges whatever complacency and discouragement we might have about our relationships because there is always more growth, peace, and blessing that God’s grace can bring, even here on earth.”¹⁶

GOD’S DESIGN FOR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Matthew 5:21-25 ~ You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Matthew 18

Acts 1:14-15; 2:44-46; 4:23-24, 32-37; 5:12; 15:22-25

Romans 12:9-21 ~ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Corinthians 1:10 ~ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Galatians 5:16-26 ~ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 4

- A Preservation of Unity (vv. 1-6)
- An Appreciation of Diversity (vv. 7-10)
- A Culture of Maturity (vv. 11-16)
- A Rejection of Sinful Tendencies (vv. 17-32)

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

- Self-Indulgence (vv. 19-24)
- Deceit (v. 25)
- Anger (vv. 26-27)
- Selfishness (v. 28)
- Unkind speech (vv. 29-30)
- Bitterness (v. 31)
- Unforgiveness (v. 32)

Philippians 2:1-5 ~ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Colossians 3:1-14 ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

POSITIVE ONE ANOTHERS

- Love one another (John 13:34 AND 16 other places)
- Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10)
- Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)
- Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
- Build up one another (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11)
- Be likeminded towards one another (Rom 15:5)
- Accept one another (Rom 15:7)
- Admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16) Greet one another (Rom 16:16)
- Care for one another (1 Cor 12:25)
- Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Forgive one another (Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:13)
- Be patient with one another (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13)
- Speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15, 25)
- Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)
- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)
- Submit to one another (Eph 5:21, 1 Pet 5:5)
- Consider others better than yourselves (Phil 2:3)
- Look to the interests of one another (Phil 2:4)
- Bear with one another (Col 3:13)

- Teach one another (Col 3:16)
- Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)
- Encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- Exhort one another (Heb 3:13)
- Stir up [provoke, stimulate] one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24)
- Show hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Employ the gifts that God has given us for the benefit of one another (1 Pet 4:10)
- Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Pet 5:5)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

NEGATIVE ONE ANOTHERS

- Do not lie to one another (Col 3:9)
- Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom 14:13)
- If You keep on biting and devouring each other...you'll be destroyed by each other (Gal 5:15)
- Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Gal 5:26)
- Do not slander one another (James 4:11)
- Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)