

Practical Christian Living

Advance in Faith Unit 104

Week 4: Healthy Relationships



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To help believers recognise the value and importance of their relationships;*
- *To highlight biblical perspectives on the variety of relationships that exist;*
- *To encourage believers to commit to caring for their relationships in a healthy and God-honouring way;*

The Relationship Wisdom of Jesus

Jesus taught that the greatest commandment of all was that we love God with all that we are and all that we have (heart, soul, mind and strength) and that we love others the way we ourselves want to be loved (**Matthew 22:36-40**).

Restored relationship with God will always lead to right relationship with others.

The relationship wisdom of Jesus can be summed up in a statement that many refer to as the ‘Golden Rule’. It is essentially an expression of the ultimate Kingdom value, that being selfless love.

“Do to others what you would have them do to you” - (Luke 6:31)

For every type of relationship that we find ourselves in there are roles to play and responsibilities to fulfil. These are some of the more common expressions of relationship and what the Bible says about them:

1. The Family

1.1 The Marriage Covenant Relationship

The traditional Christian view of marriage is that this covenant relationship between husband and wife was designed and instituted by God (**Genesis 1:27-28**). God both endorses marriage and is consciously and actively involved in the covenant union (**Matthew 19:6**). The marriage covenant according to God’s original design was intended for heterosexual couples (**Matthew 19:4**) and ideally should only be ended by death (**Matthew 19:6**). The marriage of husband and wife signifies the establishment of a new family (**Matthew 19:5**), one that is independent of the extended family or original families from which the couple came.

Those united in marriage covenant have roles and responsibilities to fulfil. For the marriage to be successful, both husband and wife must fulfil their obligations towards one another. In so doing they become good stewards of the covenant relationship given to them by God.

*Mutual Responsibilities***a. Don't deprive one another of sexual fulfilment (1 Cor. 7:3-5).**

Sex between a husband and wife is a gift from God. It is designed to be both the means to procreation and the source of pleasure and intimacy. Sex however is incredibly powerful and, unfortunately, can be used to manipulate and exercise control. It goes without saying that this should never be allowed to happen. A husband or wife should not seek to 'get revenge' by deliberately withholding sex from their partner. The only time sex can be withheld from one another is during times of deliberate fasting (from sex) for the sake of prayer and this only when there is mutual consent (vs. 5). If sexual needs are not met within the marriage relationship the temptation to have them met elsewhere becomes great. Communication concerning needs and desires in this area is essential. Speak openly and honestly with one another and respect one another's boundaries.

b. Be faithful to one another (1 Cor. 6:15-17).

Marriage is a life-long commitment that should be characterised by mutual fidelity and love. Both the temptation and the opportunity to be unfaithful are great and both husband and wife must live their lives with caution and restraint. Again, honest communication concerning potential 'danger' areas is good and can help create mutual accountability and care.

c. Do not separate what God has joined (divorce) (Matt 19:6).

Divorce is an unfortunate reality both in society and within the church and often people are victims of divorce rather than instigators of it. By law a unilateral divorce is now possible, leaving the other party powerless to reconcile. However, divorce was never part of God's plan and was only ever allowed as a concession (**Matthew 19:7**). The reason that God hates divorce (**Malachi 2:16**) is because it destroys people's lives and damages a wide circle of relationships around the marriage. In addition to this the marriage relationship is a natural representation of a deeper spiritual reality that being the eternal covenant between Christ and the Church (**Ephesians 5:22-31**). God's ideal and original plan is that a man and a woman remain life partners until death separates them. This is not an unattainable goal and every effort must be made to seek the help and grace of God in achieving it.

d. Love each other (Ephesians 5:25) (Titus 2:4).

'Love is a verb'. Love is not just something you feel but something you choose. If to love one's spouse is a command, then to love one's spouse is an act of obedience and an act of obedience is an act of the will. Love therefore is volitional before it is emotional - a decision to behave in a certain way towards your spouse. Generally your feelings will follow your actions and once you start to *act* in love you will begin to *feel* in love.

e. Respect each other (Ephesians 5:33) (1 Peter 3:7)

Mutual respect for one another is essential for a healthy relationship. A husband should respect his wife's opinions, thoughts, suggestions and needs and a wife should do likewise. Appreciation for one another's uniqueness should be regularly expressed and celebrated.

1.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Children

To obey their parents in the Lord (**Ephesians 6:1-3**) (**Philippians 2:8**)

To honour their parents (**Ephesians 6:2**)

To care for their parents in their old age (**1 Timothy 5:4**)

1.3 Roles and Responsibilities of the Parents

To teach their children (**Prov. 22:6**) (**Deut. 6:7**) (**Genesis 18:19**)

To discipline their children in love (**Prov. 19:18**) (**Prov. 29:17**)

To love their children (**Titus 2:4**)

The Family as a threat to the devotion of the disciple

The teaching of Jesus concerning the family appears somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand he affirms the importance and value of the family as a social institution and yet He also warns of the potential dangers of the family for the child of God. In **Matthew 10:35-39** Jesus warns of the possibility of division within the family over the disciple's devotion (vs. 35) and maintains that He has pre-eminence over the family (vs. 37). When forced to choose between one's natural family and one's new found spiritual leader (the Lord Himself), the believer must choose the latter (as is often the case for believers in countries where Christians are persecuted).

2. Friendships

Friendships are a vital part of the believer's spiritual, social and emotional growth. Friendships however can either make or break you so the believer should choose his / her friends carefully (**Prov. 12:26**). The people that we associate with have a profound influence on us and to a large extent we become like them (**Prov. 13:20**). The problem with us as humans is that we tend to gravitate towards people who share our weaknesses. People who are strong in areas where we are weak tend to intimidate and frighten us. This however is not a good habit. We should endeavour to build relationships with people who are strong in the areas where we are weak. This way we are forced to change and grow. We should also endeavour to intentionally build friendships with those who hold different views and ideas to us as these relationships can enlarge our hearts and minds and develop a deeper understanding of those from other cultures and creeds with whom we share the world.

3. Professional / Vocational Relationships

The majority of Christians today find themselves in secular employment. This means that they are placed into positions requiring interaction with either an employer or employees or both. Often these work relationships are with non-believers and the Christian is compelled to be both a witness and a worker at the same time. It is important in such circumstances to have a clear set of priorities and be balanced and mature in your role and responsibilities. While the Christian certainly has the spread of the gospel as his / her priority mandate, this does not mean that the Christian can neglect legitimate obligations towards his / her employer. Paul says that Christian employees should fulfil their obligations to their bosses as though they were fulfilling them towards Christ, with sincerity and diligence (**Ephesians 6:5-8**) (**Colossians 3:22**). At the same time Christian employers are exhorted to be fair and impartial (**Ephesians 6:9**) (**Colossians 4:1**).

Conclusion: Communication the Key

Clear, honest, open and respectful communication is essential to building strong, healthy, godly relationships of every kind regardless of the context. A commitment to this type of two-way communication will go a long way to ensuring that our relationships are healthy and mutually beneficial.

Discussion Questions

1. You have discovered that your best friend's spouse is having a secret extra-marital affair. What should you do?
2. Your 14-year-old son has decided he doesn't want to attend church with you anymore. What should you say to him?
3. Your best friend is not a believer in Christ. He/she has just been diagnosed with cancer. What should you do/say?
4. What do you think relationships need in order to thrive?
5. What one act of relational generosity can you begin to weave into the fabric of your relationships this week in order to strengthen them?

Memory Verse

Romans 15:5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.