

“Building Loving Relationships”

Genesis 45:1-15, Colossians 3:12-17 & Ephesians 4:29, 32 & 5:1-2

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God created a good creation. We are God’s masterpiece, created in God’s image. God is a loving relationship of three, living for eternity in perfect harmony. One aspect of being created in the image of God’s is our need for loving relationships with God and one another. Everything was perfect. Adam and Eve damaged their relationship with God. They want to be in control, to be gods themselves; so, they eat of the tree of knowledge hoping for ultimate power. When God confronts Adam, more relationships are damaged as he blames Eve, who then blames the serpent. Our ancestors’ sin, their neglect of loving relationships, caused things to rapidly spin out of control.

God did not give up on us; instead, God kept trying to reestablish a loving relationship with us. God inspires people to reveal grace – forgiving, healing, and reuniting love. We see this love in Joseph. His jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He endured brutal conditions yet constantly kept loving and forgiving everyone. In time his grace propelled him to a position of great power in Egypt. Joseph uses his position to forgive his brothers, reunite his family, and provide food for everyone in the region.

Genesis 45:1-15 NLT “Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, “Out, all of you!” So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace. “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And God is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. “Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’” Then Joseph added, “Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.”

God never gives up on us. God sent Jesus to reveal God’s love for each of us and to encourage us to love God and one another. The Apostle Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:29, 32, 5:1-2 NLT**, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God as beloved Children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” **Colossians 3:12-17 NLT** “Since God chose you to be the holy people God loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be

thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom Jesus gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Jesus to God.”

We all desire loving relationships. We long to be wanted, loved, known, heard, and understood. The greatest commandment is to build a loving relationship with God and the second is to build loving relationships with everyone in our life. The great difficulty is we are caught between times in a fallen world. Sin has tainted everything, nothing quite works. The whole creation groans waiting for all of us to come into our complete birthright, to maturity. Waiting for the day when we are all united in perfect love with God and one another. Between now and then we are commanded to build loving relationships. *Discipleship Journal* identified six qualities that transform relationships into loving relationships.

One quality is perspective. We are all imperfect people trying to relate to other imperfect people. The church is a group of imperfect people trying to grow and mirror God’s perfect love. While it is disappointing, it should not surprise us that all people make mistakes and at times seem unlovable. Perspective keeps us from becoming disillusioned and reminds us that there is beauty and love in every person. Each of us are to consider others better than ourselves, to see others through Jesus’ eyes, and to love others through Jesus’ heart. We are to see others from the perspective of heaven, a beloved child of God, a priceless treasure so valuable that Jesus died to get them back. Perspective enables us to stop looking at one another from a worldly point of view and to look at each other from heaven’s perspective.

Another key quality to building loving relationships is humility. John Calvin calls humility “the sovereign virtue...the mother and root of all virtue.” The opposite of humility is pride and self-centeredness. It is what first got Adam and Eve in trouble. It is the lust to be served, honored, noticed, to be treated like God. Gary Thomas the author of *Sacred Parenting* and *Sacred Marriage* writes, “At the heart of relational humility is self-forgetfulness...The world doesn’t revolve around any one of us and the demand that it should do so creates nothing but frustration. There’s no good time to have a family crisis; it’s never convenient to get a flat tire. Humility acts like a filter, saving us from the tyranny of grossly unrealistic expectations that everyone and everything should bend our way. Self-forgetfulness means we are liberated to serve others at God’s direction, rather than trying to impress them. The ultimate picture of this is Jesus, washing the feet of his disciples.” Humility comes from daily forgetting our self and remembering God. Humility is a change of focus from self to the grandeur of God. Humility is the fountain of love and unity leading to selfless service to others. Stop labeling, start listening and take others into account. What if a mother started evaluating her own life as meticulously as she had fallen into evaluating her daughter’s? What if a dissatisfied man focused on how he was failing as a husband instead of how his spouse was failing as a wife? What if a teenager quit complaining about how his parents have messed him up and started asking himself how he has neglected the command to honor them?” Humility is an essential quality to any loving relationship.

Another quality is courage. Relationships are risky and it takes courage to initiate them, mend them, and deepen them. Many relationships are damaged by fears left unchecked. Fear fuels our imaginations causing us to jump to conclusions and play out worst-case scenarios. Often we know what needs to be done, or said, in a relationship; but, we just don’t have the courage to do it and to do it consistently. We need courage to be honest, to love, and to seek reconciliation. We are to speak the truth in love. We need to be honest about who we are, what we are feeling and have the courage to share the truth with one another. Sin is destructive. It hurts people and devastates relationships. Sometimes we cannot see our sin, our failure to love and be loved: so, we need someone with courage to speak the truth in love, to point out who we are not loving. Even Peter, the rock on which the church is built, needed Paul to confront him about his negative views toward the Gentiles. Scripture commands us to seek reconciliation. We are commanded to forgive when someone hurts us and to apologize when we have hurt someone else. In both cases it takes courage to initiate reconciliation. We are called to have courage making every effort to maintain peace and unity.

Loving relationships flourish on inspiration. Inspire means to breathe into, reminding us of when God breathed life into the formed dust of the ground giving humanity life. Anyone who breathes in the life and love of God is capable of inspiring another filling them with life and love. Let yourself be inspired by others. Be an inspiration to others. We are all companions on a spiritual journey, at times we need to be inspired to take the next step and at other times we need to inspire another to take the next step. Inspiration flourishes when we

share God sightings. Christian fellowship is sharpening, speaking, listening, praying and inspiring leaps of faith. If you find this difficult, then Adam Holz recommends using questions such as: What have you been learning from God these days? How do you see God at work in your life? How can I pray for you? What has gotten your attention from God's word today? What promises has God given you? Share your day with another by explaining when you felt closets to God, when you enjoyed peace, love, grace, joy or creativity. Strive to inspire, build up and add value to every person in your life so they all leave your presence a better person. Inspiration fuels loving relationships.

We build loving relationships with generosity. A generous spirit believes the best about another and creates an atmosphere of welcome and safety. Generosity is sharing and providing hospitality. Pastor Mathew Woodley defines "generosity as grace in action". God shows grace to us and generosity is when we pass that grace on to others with our unmerited generous love.

Our sixth quality that builds loving relationships is attentiveness. Have you ever found yourself to be distracted while someone is talking to you? Maybe mentally formulating what to say next, drifting into a daydream, thinking about your to do list or your next project. Most of us find it difficult to be fully attentive. Have you noticed the attentiveness of Jesus? You get the sense that every person that came in contact with Jesus felt like they were the only person in the world as he listened to them. Jesus' attentiveness enabled Him to see what lay beneath their outer appearances, to hear what their hearts spoke that their mouths could not—as Jesus did with the woman at the well. Jesus was not distracted by what others had to say: the grumbling of the Pharisees as Mary anointed Jesus' feet, the push of the crowds as the hemorrhaging woman touched the hem of His garment. Jesus was attentive. Attentiveness says, "I care about you, you are worth my full attention, you are precious." Attentiveness enables us to bear one another's burdens. Stacey Padrick writes, "When we pray attentively for others, we demonstrate that we have heard them. We carry to God what they have shared—their concerns, joys, sorrows, pain—and open ourselves to any words of encouragement or scripture the Holy Spirit would give us for them... Our attentive prayers... affirm the worth and wonder of individuals. We are saying, "You have been intricately created by God and made in God's image. We are agreeing with God that this creation of God's is infinitely valuable worthy of our time and attention. And because every person is made in God's image, we might be surprised to find that when we pay attention to another, we catch a glimpse of God and we become more attentive to God as well."

We have come full circle back to a relational loving God who breaths love into all of us and desires us to love God back and love everyone. Strive to grow in the six qualities of loving relationships. Perspective, seeing others from heaven's view, their beauty and what they will become. Humility, daily self-forgetfulness and serving others, because you consider everyone better than yourself. Courage to engage, forgive, love, and speak the truth in love. Inspiration, breathing life and love into others, encouraging them to take the next step with God, and leaving every person a better person after their time in your presence. Generosity, grace in action that loves and accepts. Attentiveness being fully present and lifting others up to God in prayer. **Colossians 3:14 NLT "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."** Amen