Relationships & Marriages & Other Messes

Session One: The Most Important Relationship

We live with this tension between self-protective isolation and the dream for meaningful relationships. (p. 17 of *Relationships – A Mess Worth Making*)

When I live out of a biblical sense of who I am (identity) and rest in who God is (worship), I will be able to build a healthy relationship with you. (p. 57 of *Relationships – A Mess Worth Making*)

We are tempted to make a relationship either less or more than it was intended to 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. (p. 17 of Relationships – A Mess Worth Making)

Three Relational Profiles - In each scenario there is a relational impasse.

- **The Frustrated Relationship:** the movement is away from the other.
- **The Enmeshed Relationship:** the move toward the other is so extreme that it is impossible to satisfy expectations.
- **The Isolated Relationship:** the movement towards safety precludes real relationships. (p. 19 of *Relationships – A Mess Worth Making*)

BIG QUESTION:

"What purpose does God intend relationships to serve in my life? As a person created in His image, what should my relationships look like?"

"Rightly understood, theology is the real life story of God's relationship to us and our relationship to one another lived out in a broken world. By this definition, whether you "think" theologically or not, you are "doing" theology every day in the decisions you make, the words you speak, the feelings you have, and the attitudes you nurture in your heart. All of these responses are rooted in your perspective on the nature of God, yourself, your relationships, and the world around you. These "perspectives" are theology because they inform and frame the way you live your life. The question is not whether you are a theologian, but what kind of theologian are you!" (p.19 & 20 Relationships–A Mess Worth Making)

You cannot talk about human beings made in God's image without talking about relationship. Yet it is often the first thing we overlook.

- Only when human beings live in community do we fully reflect the likeness of God.
- Only when we start with God – someone bigger than ourselves – can we escape the destructive results of our own selfishness. (p. 26 - 27 of Relationships – A Mess Worth Making)

Good Relationships are Always Built on the Foundation Stones of Identity and Worship

Either I get my identity

- Vertically out of my sense of who God is and who He has made me in Christ
- Horizontally, out of my circumstances, relationships, and successes.

For our relationships to be what God designed them to be, the rebuilding, restoring, and reconciling must start with a solid new foundation.

Who you tell yourself you are has a very powerful impact on the way you deal with the big and small issues of daily life. In the same way, where you find your identity will have everything to do with how you respond to the hard work of relationships with others.

No human being was ever meant to be the source of personal joy and contentment for someone else. And surely, no sinner is ever going to be able to pull that off day after day in the all-encompassing relationship of marriage!

- Your spouse, your friends, and your children cannot be the sources of your identity.
- When you seek to define who you are through those relationships, you are actually asking another sinner to be your personal messiah, to give you the inward rest of soul that only God can give.
- Only when I have sought my identity in the proper place (in my relationship with God) am I able to put you in the proper place as well.
- When I relate to you knowing that I am God's child and the recipient of his grace, I am able to serve and love you.
    - I have the hope and courage to get my hands dirty with the hard work involved when two sinners live together.
    - And you are able to do the same with me.

If I am seeking to get identity from you:

- I will watch you too closely, listen to you too intently, & need you too fundamentally.
- I will ride the roller coaster of your best & worst moments and everything in between.
- And because I am watching you too closely, I will become acutely aware of your weaknesses and failures. I will become overly critical, frustrated, disappointed, hopeless, and angry.
    - I will be angry not because you are a sinner, but because you have failed to deliver the one thing I seek from you: identity. But none of us will ever get the well-being that comes from knowing who we are from our relationships.
        - We will be left with damaged relationships filled with hurt, frustration, and anger.

When we remember that Christ has given me everything I need to be the person he has designed me to be:

- I am free to serve and love you.
- When I know who I am, I am free to be humble, gentle, patient, forbearing, and loving as we navigate the inevitable messiness of relationships.

BIG QUESTION:

"Is there evidence that you are looking to your relationships to give you things you have already been given in Christ?" (p. 56 - 60 of Relationships – A Mess Worth Making)

God is working in every situation and relationship to reclaim our wandering hearts.

- He wants to make us people who are more interested in what he wants for us than what we want for ourselves.
- He will not relent until we are free from our slavery to an agenda of personal happiness. And he calls us to speak in a way that has this reconciliation agenda in view.

Your words are always in pursuit of some kind of kingdom.

- Speaking as a mini-king, seeking to establish your will in your relationships and circumstances.
- Speaking as an ambassador, seeking to be part of what the King is doing.

Ephesians 4:29-30
Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with who you were sealed for the day of redemption.

If you want your words to reflect what God wants more than what you want, you should consider three things:

- Consider the person ("only what is helpful for building others up")
    - I now have a redemptive agenda for talking about everything.
- Consider the problem ("according to their needs")
    - My words must be shaped by your need. An ambassador's words always address the person's true need of the moment.
- Consider the process ("that it may benefit those who listen")
    - Ambassador communication is not just about the content of our words, but the manner in which they are spoken.
    - An ambassador seeks to speak the right thing in the best way.

(p. 73-75 of Relationships – A Mess Worth Making)