Relationships & Marriages & Other Messes

Session Three: The Purpose and Hope of Relationships

In the middle of working on a relationship:

- Thankfulness often degrades into complaint, and hope decays into resignation.
- People in the middle usually discover that more work is involved than they ever expected.
- It is hard to hold onto the dream, & very often expectation becomes the desire to simply survive.
- Amidst the hard work, it is difficult to keep your standards high and your hope alive. You are tempted to settle and compromise.

Relationships are lived between the already and the not yet:

- Already Jesus has come to provide salvation for us, but his saving work is not complete.
- Already the power of sin has been broken, but the presence of sin has not yet been eradicated.
- Already we have grown and changed in many ways, but we are not yet all we will be in Christ.
- Already we passed through much difficulty, but we have not yet climbed our final hill.
- Already we have learned many lessons of faith, but we have not yet learned to trust God fully.
- Already God has established his kingdom in our hearts, but that kingdom has not yet fully come.
- Already we have seen the defeat of sin in many ways, but its final defeat has not yet taken place.

So we live as broken people who are being repaired,
among neighbors in the same condition –
always thankful for what has already been done,
but ever aware of our need for what we have not yet been given.

Relationships in the Middle:

- Our relationships will never work according to our plan
- Our relationships will never live up to our expectations
    - At some point in every relationship, we are required to accept graciously who the other person is, even as we humbly admit who we are.
- Our relationships will always grapple with some kind of difficulty
    - The Bible continually reminds us that God sends the uncomfortable grace of trial not to crush or discourage us, but to mature and refine us. As we are realistic about difficulty, that needs to be our hope.
- Our relationships will always need to improve
    - For all of our love and commitment, we have not yet escaped our sin, so our relationship still requires hard work and the resources of God's grace.

What is needed?

- It takes humility to live with a sinner in a world of difficulty.
- It takes gentleness to be part of what God is doing in someone's life and not get in the way.
- It takes patience to deal with the sin and weakness of those around you.
- It takes perseverance to be a part of change in a relationship because that change is most often a process and rarely an event.
- It takes forgiveness to move beyond the times you have been mistreated by another.
- It takes forbearance to continue to love a person, even when you're being provoked.
- It takes remarkable love to serve the good of the other person & not be distracted by daily needs.

Galatians 5: 22 – 26
Ephesians 4: 1 – 3
Philippians 2: 1 – 11
Colossians 3: 12 – 14

Encouragement in the Middle:

- Encouragement is an essential skill of a biblically healthy community.
- Real encouragement is more about sightedness than it is about explanation.
    - Eyes of the heart
    - Spiritual sightedness is a precious gift and an essential life skill.

Our relationship problems can loom so large that they obstruct our view of the one thing that can give us the hope and courage to go on. That one thing is Christ.

- Encouragement is not just about making people feel and think better; it's about stimulating spiritual imagination.
- Encouragement gives struggling people the eyes to see an unseen Christ. He is the only reliable hope when the call of relationship has taken me way beyond my own wisdom, strength, and character.

How do we encourage one another in the middle of relational hardship? By giving each other eyes to see three things:

- Christ's presence
- Christ's promises
- Our potential in Christ

A Verse to Commit to Memory - Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.
The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me.

Mercy:

- Mercy is the kind, sympathetic, and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and cancel their debt.
- Mercy is compassion combined forbearance and action.
- Mercy looks at the trouble of others and cares, acts, forgives, and perseveres.
- Mercy is essential because our relationships take place in the middle of the great redemptive story.
- Mercy is needed because neither the world we live in nor the people who inhabit it are perfect.
- We want mercy for ourselves because we want our lives to be comfortable, and we want justice for the other guy because we want our lives to be comfortable.
- Mercy is what we have received and what we are called to give.
- Mercy is my commitment to live alongside you in this broken world, even though I will suffer with you, for you, and because of you.

What makes mercy merciful is a heartfelt compassion that results in some kind of action toward the other person. Mercy is not just something you feel; mercy is something you do. It is a lifestyle, a stance toward others that shapes everything we say and do.

We struggle to respond rightly to one another
because we don't have God in the right place.
Mercy in our relationships has been compromised
by the subtle pursuit of various god replacements.

BIG QUESTION:

Do your desires get in the way of offering mercy to others?

Going forward from today:

- Was there one major takeaway for you from the teachings this morning? If so, where does it take you?
- Have you been able to identify areas in your life that are creating concerns and/or issues in your relationships?
- Do you have a better idea as to what would be helpful for you to move forward in all your relationships?
- Please let us know at care@pcpc.org if you feel like you would benefit from being in a Small Group or if you would like to speak with someone specifically about your relationship(s). Those options are definitely available to you.

Thank you for your engagement & participation in our time together today.
Let's now enjoy lunch and our time engaging in our panel discussion with
Kari Stainback, French Jones & Pat Hobin.