

**Cleaning Up Messy Relationships**  
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We've been in a series titled "Relationships a Mess Worth Making." Today is the last message in this series.

If all of life could be summed up in one word, that word could be love. Loving God and loving people is the greatest commandment... and you can't do that apart from Relationships. If we succeed at every other area, but fail to have loving relationships, we've missed the whole meaning of life.

We were created for community. We're better together. We're wired for relationships. We're formed for a family. Romans 12:5 says:

*Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.*

Pastor Olen and Syble (who are our spiritual parents) taught us this when we were under their leadership. We now teach it to our elders and leaders. We can't ask you to do something that we as elders and pastors aren't doing. We encourage them to have relationship with one another. Not just at work - but to live life together.

That's what Paul taught us to do in I Thessalonians 2:8:

*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us.*

Basically Paul is saying that two things are important: sharing the gospel and sharing our lives.

The problem is it's easy to get disconnected: from our spouse, our children, our parents, our siblings, our friends and our co-workers.

We get disconnected for so many reasons:

- We're too busy and we don't make time for people or
- We lack commitment and we don't make people a priority or
- We're afraid of getting close because we might get hurt or
- We're too prideful to admit we need someone or
- We're so judgmental that no one meets our standards or
- We just think relationships are too messy.

And relationships are messy....but I hope this series has taught you that relationships are a mess worth making.

And today we're going to learn some ways to clean up the mess or better yet...how to prevent some messes in the first place.

My sermon is titled "Cleaning up Messy Relationships." So let's talk about some causes of messy relationships and how to clean up the mess.

The first cause of messy relationships is:

### **1. SELFISHNESS**

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to be selfish? James 4:1-2 says:

*What causes fights and quarrels, don't they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but you don't get it.*

In a new relationship we seem to work real hard at disguising selfishness. Take dating for example: In the beginning if the person we are dating is sick, we say things like: "Baby darling, I'm worried about that sniffle. So I've called the paramedics to rush you to the Hospital. And I know you don't like hospital food, so I'm having gourmet meals brought in for you."

That's how it is when you're dating. Then we get married, time goes by and selfishness begins to creep in.

The first year of a marriage:

"Sweetheart, I don't like the sound of that cough. I've arranged for our Dr. to make a house call. Let me tuck you in bed."

Second year of a marriage:

"Look, be sensible. I know you don't feel good, so after you've fixed dinner, washed the dishes and bathed the kids, you should go to bed."

Third year of marriage and on:

"Do you have to cough so loud? I can't hear the TV. Could you cough in the other room? You sound like a barking dog."

You know, over time we just stop making the effort. It's human nature to think about ourselves and not others. I naturally think about my needs, my interests, and my hurts.

Proverbs 28:25 says: *Selfishness only causes trouble.*

Instead - selflessness means less of me, and more of you. I begin to think less about my needs and more about your needs.

This is how we clean up the mess selfishness has made.

Philippians 2:4 says: *Look out for one another's interest, not just your own.*

If you will give others what they need, not what they deserve, even the most unlovable person can be transformed.

When Joe and I married there were times when I could be very unlovable.

I came from a very dysfunctional family and I had a lot of pain.

I would yell and say mean things.

I would pick a fight and then give Joe the silent treatment.

I would be totally selfish and Joe would just love me selflessly.

He would apologize and ask forgiveness even though I never did.

I remember one time I was so mad that I got out of the car at a stop light, slammed the door and started to walk home. He parked the car and walked with me until we resolved the problem.

No matter how mean or unkind I was Joe always loved me selflessly. And I can tell you that love transformed me. By his example I began to see that I didn't have to yell or be mean. You see that is God's kind of love. That's how you clean up a messy relationship. Galatians 6:7-8 says:

*The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others and ignoring God, harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for it in his life is weeds. But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life and eternal life.*

This verse is talking about sowing and reaping.

Whatever you sow in life, you're going to reap.

If you sow criticism, people are going to be critical of you.

If you sow affirmation, people are going to affirm you.

If you want to plant good seeds, this verse says "Plant in response to God."

In relationships, we need to respond to God, not to what others do.

That means when somebody is offensive I don't react to the offense.

Instead I respond the way God would...in the opposite spirit.

If they're hateful, I'm loving.

If they're mean, I'm kind.

If they're rude, I'm polite.

That is selflessness.

That's what Joe did. He didn't respond to me he responded to God.

You see one of the greatest lessons in life is learning to be unselfish....and learning to be unselfish is a lifelong lesson.

The second cause of messy relationships is:

## **2. PRIDE**

Pride shows up in a lot of ways.

If you are critical, judgmental or you tend to look down on people...

If you are stubborn, or if you find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry."

If you choke on your apologies, and you hardly ever admit you're wrong...

If you offer unsolicited advice because you think you have all the answers...

You have a pride problem.

Pride will cause big messes in our relationships. Proverbs 13:10 says:

*Pride leads to arguments.*

A prideful person is almost always arguing with someone and can't figure out why. "Why doesn't everyone see it my way? What's wrong with all these people?" Proverbs 16:18 says:

*Pride will destroy a person. A proud attitude leads to ruin.*

Talk about making a mess! Pride messes up relationships but humility cleans them up. Humility can be learned in relationships. A basic law of relationships is this:

We tend to become like the people we spend time with.

If we spend time with negative people, we get more negative.

If we spend time with happy people, we get happier...

and if we spend time with humble people we will be more humble.

If you want to know what you'll be like in five years, look at the people you spend time with. So if you want to have humility, be careful who you spend time with.

No one is more humble than Jesus, coming from heaven to earth, becoming a man, giving His life for us, and being resurrected for us. As we spend time with Him, we become more humble and avoid a lot of messes. Philippians 2:3 & 5-6 says:

*Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not demand and cling to His rights as God.*

The third cause of messy relationships is:

## **3. RESENTMENT**

Job 5:2 says:

*To worry yourself to death with resentment is a foolish, senseless thing to do.*

All of us are going to be hurt in relationships.  
 The question is what do we do with that hurt?  
 Are we going to allow it to make us better or bitter?

Have you ever noticed how little things can cause big resentment in relationships? Song of Solomon 2:15 says:

*Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards.*

And if we hold on to those irritations they turn into resentment. So what do we do with these little irritations?

Several years ago Pastor Joe and I went on a cruise. Every evening at dinner we were seated at a table with other people. We were fine with that.

However, by Tuesday, I was irritated because I wanted a dinner alone with Joe so we could talk. So when we were alone at lunch on Wednesday I was ready to talk. I tried several times to engage Joe in a conversation but he wanted to relax and enjoy the ocean view.

So, I just let it go. Or at least I thought I let it go. Until the next morning when we woke up and he tries to give me a Good Morning kiss. It was obvious that I was upset.

So I explained to him what's bothering me. Of course his first response was "Why didn't you just say something? Why didn't you tell me you were irritated and wanted to talk?"

And of course I responded like every woman would... "I wanted YOU to want to talk. I didn't want you to talk just because I asked you to. I wanted you to be a mind reader."

The point is I should have told him I was upset and we could have avoided a mess. It's always better to communicate before we get resentful. Incidentally, when we're resentful, we're hurting ourselves more than anyone else. We're all upset and others are just fine.

Hebrews 12:15 says:

*Look after each other. Watch out that no bitterness, (that's resentment) takes root among you, for as it springs up, it causes deep trouble hurting many in their spiritual lives.*

You see resentment makes a mess of things but forgiveness cleans up the mess. And if you're going to have a long-term, lasting relationships or marriages you're going to need massive doses of forgiveness. Since Pastor Joe preached about this I'm not going to elaborate.

But Colossians 3:13 says

*You must make allowances for each other's' faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

You see forgiveness is not making excuses for the person who hurt you. It's not minimizing the hurt. It's not saying it wasn't wrong. Forgiveness is letting go of my right to get even. Why? Because God says to and holding on only makes me miserable. Forgiveness is the only way to clean up messy relationships.

The fourth cause of messy relationships is:

#### **4. INSECURITY**

People that are insecure really struggle with self-doubt, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. They don't have a good identity.

Identity is how we define ourselves– our talents, qualities, experiences, achievements, dreams, goals, beliefs, relationships, all say... “This is who I am.” I believe our identity must come from God. Yes, others can impact our identity – either for good or for bad – but we must know who God says we are first and foremost.

Much of our messes in relationships are because we attempt to get something from our relationships that we can only find in Christ. Also, what we believe about ourselves will determine the way we get along with others.

If I think I'm un-loveable, I'll have a hard time believing you love me.  
 If I think I'm a failure, I won't believe you when you praise me for my success.  
 And this really causes messes in our relationships.

- The children of Israel forgot that they were children of God Almighty and they worshiped idols.
- Abraham and Sarah forgot their significance when they gave up on God's promise for a child and decided Abraham should have a child with Hagar.
- The disciples forgot they were chosen so they hid in fear when Jesus faced death.
- Peter forgot who he was when he gave in to fear of man and denied Jesus three times.

Since they didn't know who they were in Christ they caused some big messes. However, there are also many biblical examples of those who remembered who they were and avoided some big messes.

- Moses was able to lead the Children of Israel through the Red Sea because he knew he was God's chosen leader.

- David conquered Goliath because he knew his strength was in God.
- Paul and Silas were able to sing while they were chained in prison because they knew who they were and who their God was.
- Stephen was able to do miraculous wonders and see the glory of God while being stoned to death because He knew he was a child of God.

You see who you believe you are has a very powerful impact on how you deal with life and with the people in your life.

Insecurity really can mess up a relationship, but knowing who you are in God can prevent so many messes. Ask God to show you who you are in Him and He will do it.

The fifth cause of messy relationships is:

## **5. LACK OF COMMITMENT**

According to Webster's Dictionary, commitment is an agreement or pledge to do something. It comes from the word commit - as in "commit to prison." It is voluntary imprisonment to a relationship even in the midst of crisis.

This implies an agreement to stay together no matter what. When it would be easier to walk out, you walk in, lock the door and throw away the key. Commitment implies working through struggles.

According to Psychology Today, a study of 40 thousand friends revealed that betrayal is the #1 reason friendships end. You see we really don't know how committed we are until we face adversity, offenses or hurts.

Commitment says, "I'm staying and working this out. I won't cut and run when the going gets tough."

Many of you have heard of the great missionary David Livingstone. The missionary society wanted to send helpers so they wrote to David to ask him if there was a good road to where he was. If the answer was yes then they would send men to join him.

Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a "good road" I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."

On the road of life I want friends that are committed to me when there's "no road at all."

Commitment stays when times get tough!  
Commitment presses on when it's easier to give up!

Yes, relationships are messy, but if we are committed – with God’s help - we can clean up the messes and have loving relationships.

Yes relationships are messy - but we can clean up messy relationships by being:  
Selfless  
Humble  
Forgiving  
Secure and  
Committed.

I ask you today “Will you give relationships all you’ve got?”  
Will you put the needs of others before your own needs?  
Will you stop being critical and say you’re sorry?  
Will you let go of resentment and forgive others?  
Will you ask God to show you who you are in Him?  
Will you stay when it’s easy to walk away?