

Dependency in Relationships
Pastor Deborah Oakley – GFC - July 9, 2017

This week we celebrated Independence Day in America. Independence is something American's take pride in. But independence is not good when it comes to relationships. It hinders relationship with God and with other people.

But so does the other extreme – which is codependence – where people are too enmeshed and needy. To have healthy relationships, we must find the proper balance of dependency in relationships.

We are in a sermon series titled “Relationships: A Mess Worth Making.” The title of my message today is Dependency in Relationships.

Last week we learned that relationships are messy because we're all flawed and we sin against each other. Relationships are messy because we're a mess. However, as messy as they are, Relationships are a mess worth making. By God's grace relationships can be the source of love and joy that God intended... in spite of the mess! You see God redeems our mess by showing us what's in our hearts so He can make us more like Him.

We also learned that God exists in community within the trinity, and we are made in His image, therefore we also must exist in community. The trinity is the model for community and we are created for relationships. Community with each other is part of our humanity. We were created to love God and each other. The New Living Translation of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says:

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

I believe the three that are being talked about are two people in relationship committed to each other and to God! That is a powerful force!

However, the only way we will ever be able experience that is if we first love God. We can't have community with each other until we have community with God. God must be first and others second. Things get really messy when we reverse this order and put second things first. Then instead of unity we have co-dependency or independence.

Co-dependents believe they just can't live without others. They expect others to provide what they aren't providing for themselves. They need others to make them feel good about themselves.

They're too needy, enmeshed and overly dependent. Their theme song is "I Can't Live if Living is Without You."

Those who are too independent are self-reliant to the point of believing they don't need others. They tend towards needlessness and self-protective isolation. Their theme song is "You can go or you can stay, I won't love you either way."

All of us live somewhere between these two extremes and the dream of meaningful relationships. We're either moving towards others because we feel lonely or pulling away from others because we've been hurt. Neither of these is God's model for biblical relationships. Without a biblical model we will have imbalance and frustration.

So what is your typical behavior?

Isolation and independence? which says "I want to be safe" Or

Immersion and co-dependency? which says "I need you in order to live."

Regardless of which behavior you lean towards... there are three relationship profiles that arise from these two extremes.

1. The frustrated relationship

In this relationship one person moves towards isolation and the other towards immersion. One dreams of being safe and the other dreams of being close and intimate. The isolationist tends to feel smothered while the immersionist feels rejected. These two extremes leave both individuals feeling frustrated and angry.

Imagine how it would look getting ready for a vacation. One would pack a stack of books while the other just wants to talk.

2. The enmeshed relationship

Here both move towards immersion. They ride the roller coaster of each other's emotions. They are both so dependent on the other that they both easily get their feelings hurt when their needs aren't met. They both believe that relationships are everything and without them they are a nobody.

Each is looking to the other to meet their deepest emotional needs. They both are very sensitive, easily hurt and critical. They usually don't feel like they measure up to the others expectations. This kind of relationship is exhausting because the work involved makes peace impossible. These two would spend every waking moment of a vacation together.

3. The isolated relationship.

Here both people move toward isolation. They both know the dangers of relationships and both opt for safety.

Conversations are limited and impersonal and avoid self-disclosure. They both believe that relationships are too difficult and not worth the effort.

These relationships are complicated because the need to be safe collides with the longing for relationship. Because we are created for relationship but fear it at the same time...they end up empty and disappointed.

Their ideal vacation would involve a lot of time alone. Each would have their own book and be immersed in their own private world.

Notice, the one thing all of these relationship profiles have in common is a relational impasse. This will always be a struggle because we are imperfect people who struggle with sin. Yet it's so easy to think that our problems are outside of ourselves. We blame others and excuse ourselves.

Remember Adam? In Gen. 3:11-13 - remember what he said when God asked him if he ate the forbidden fruit? He blamed Eve...It was the woman you gave me - she gave me the fruit so what was I supposed to do...so I ate it.

And what about Eve...what did she say when God asked her if she sinned. She blamed the devil.

Well we all have descended from Adam and Eve and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Ever since the garden we have been blaming others for our sin. But the truth is the battle against sin exists in all of us. Romans 7:21-25 says:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

It's not about our circumstances or our wife or best friend or co-worker. It's a sin problem. And sin causes us to live for self instead of living for others. Sin also convinces us that we can change our relationships without changing ourselves and without looking to God for help. Sin will always try to get us to focus on our self. And the outcome won't be good.

You see the danger in your relationships isn't your weakness - it's your illusion of strength. Your problems are meant to bring brokenness not self-reliance or self-will or self-resolve. How can you fix the problem yourself when the problem is yourself! God wants us to die to self - not try to improve self.

And relationships are God's way of rescuing us from ourselves. It's God's way of bringing us to the end of ourselves.

It's His way of teaching us how to die to self. It's God's way of showing us that we are incapable of loving others without His love in our hearts.

Every painful thing we experience in relationships can show us how much we need God. But, one of the main ways sin affects us is to cause us to trust in ourselves rather than God.

Here are five ways that sin affects us.

When we live by **self - rule** instead of God ruling our lives, our tendency will be to control others so we can get what we want.

When we are **self – sufficient** instead of sufficient in God we will shut others out and isolate ourselves instead of having a healthy dependency.

When we are **self – righteous** we will have an inflated view of ourselves and a very critical and judgmental view of others.

When we are **self – satisfied** we will find our fulfillment apart from God. We may look to material things or worldly pleasures to meet our needs. This causes us to use others to get what we want.

So when love for God is replaced by **love for self**, we will either use people to get what we want or we'll leave them if they don't give us what we want.

James 4:1-3 says:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

The fact that relationships are messy causes some people to want to give up on relationships altogether. But –

If we have a leaky roof we don't quit living in a house – we fix it!

If our TV remote control isn't working we don't quit watching TV – we fix it!

If we have trouble with our car we don't give up driving – we fix it!

Then why do we give up on each other when we have problems?

Don't do that! Allow God to fix it!

If there are problems in your relationships the solution starts with God.

We usually think it starts with what we want. But if we try to resolve problems based on our selfish desires we're headed for defeat.

God's answer to codependence and independence is interdependence where we find a healthy balance of neediness and unity in community.

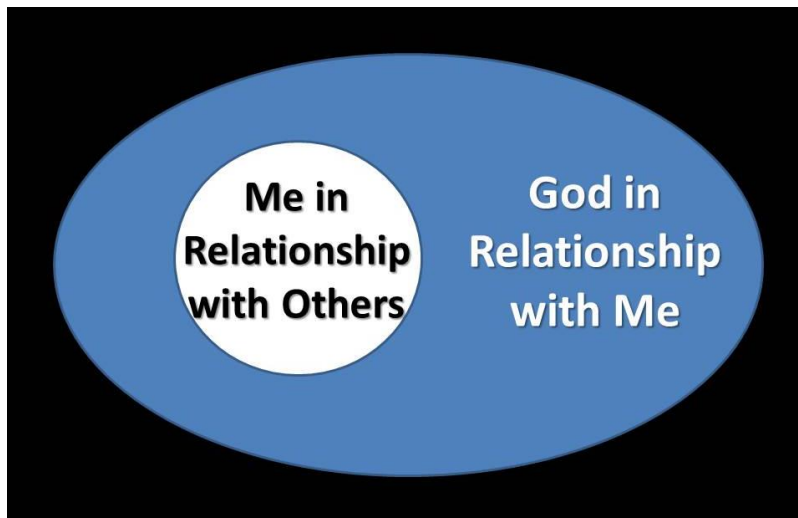
This is important because Jesus placed a high value on community. As a matter of fact right before Jesus was going to be crucified he prayed about unity in community in His last prayer on earth. John 17:11 says:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name — the name You gave Me — so that they may be one as We are one.

His last prayer was for his disciples to be one even as He and God were one. Jesus wouldn't have been praying for this if the disciples could have manufactured this on their own. Jesus knew they would need God's help. It was important enough to Jesus to pray this in His last prayer on earth. But it gets better... John 17:20-21 says:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message (That's us. Jesus is praying for us to have unity with each other) that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You.

Then He prays that our unity will be like His unity with the Father. There it is...The unity between God and Jesus is our model for unity between each other. Wow. Let me illustrate so you understand how this looks.

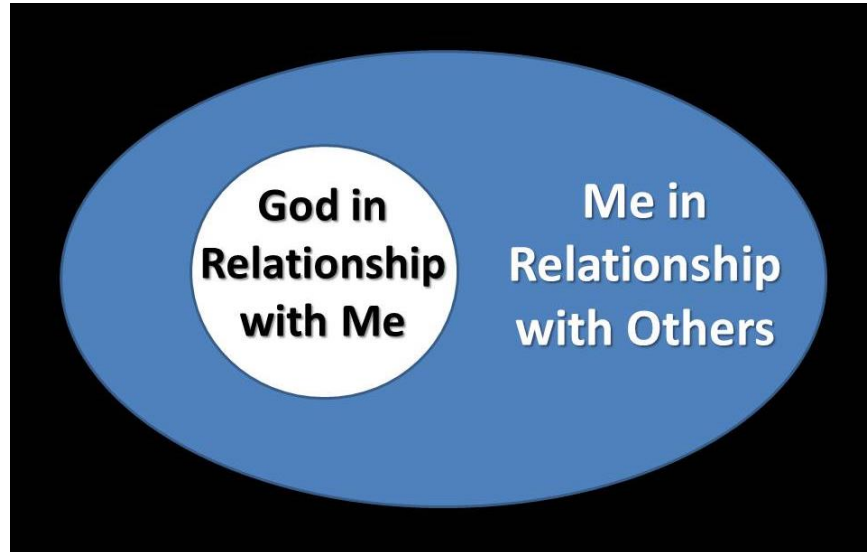


Notice how my relationship with others - which is represented by the smaller circle - is surrounded by my relationship with God which is in the larger circle. This shows how the circle of human community can only exist within the larger circle of community with God.

But here's the thing, we can't accomplish this on our own. It's so significant to me that Jesus prayed about unity right before His crucifixion. I think He knew that our sinful hearts could never experience community apart from the cross. He knew that unity would only be possible when He defeated sin once and for all.

His death and resurrection would mean we could experience a whole new community with one another. Jesus paid the ultimate price – His life – so that we could have unity and community with one another. He died to break the power of sin over our relationships. By dying He defeated sin, gave us His blood so we could be forgiven, resurrected so we could have resurrection power.

So then why is unity with one another so difficult? Here's why:



We get it backwards. Notice how my relationship with God - which is represented by the smaller circle - is surrounded by my relationship with others which is in the larger circle.

This shows how we live as though our relationships revolve around each other and God is a small part of our lives. We try to make God small and others big. But human community is only healthy when it exists within the larger circle of community with God. When we reverse this order...we become ruled by sin and selfishness and this causes all kinds of problems.

One problem I have struggled with is justifying how I respond to being sinned against. Those who hurt us are responsible for their sin but this does not excuse us from taking responsibility for our response to being sinned against. It is so easy for us to sin in response to being sinned against.

I really struggle doing this with Joe. If we have a disagreement or he does something to offend me I always say something like: "But you started it. I was just responding to what you did. I wouldn't be so upset if it wasn't for what you did."

I really sometimes believe that I'm excused from taking responsibility because Joe started it. Show me in the Bible where it says that!

We tell ourselves things like: "I can't believe they did that to me. How dare they treat me that way? They deserve whatever they get."

These statements are all indications that we aren't taking responsibility for our reaction to another's sin against us. When we do this it means that we think our biggest problem is outside of ourselves. We think our biggest problems are with other people. However, the truth is, our biggest problem is within ourselves.

John Maxwell said: The hardest person you will ever have to lead is yourself.

So when we are sinned against we need to take responsibility for how we react. A healthy relationship is one where both individuals are willing to look at their own sin, admit they have a problem, confess to God and each other and be reconciled. And reconciliation is possible. Your broken relationships can be healed and restored.

In Matthew 27:46 when Jesus was dying on the cross he cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" At that moment Jesus experienced separation from the God. The Trinity was separated from their perfect holy union as Jesus took our sin upon Himself.

I ask you...could it be that the broken relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the cross is the basis for reconciliation in our relationships? The perfect sinless relationship between the Trinity was broken so we could be reconciled to God and one another. Not because Jesus sinned. No – never! Jesus experienced broken relationship with the Father due to our sin. Hebrews 4:15 says:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

Jesus never sinned but He understands how we feel when our sin causes separation in our relationships...because He's experienced the pain of separation.

Jesus was willing to be separated from His Father so that we could know reconciliation in our families and relationships! Jesus was willing to be rejected so we could be accepted!

Jesus was willing to be the crucified King so that we could be saved from sin and ourselves! Jesus was beaten and bruised, so that by His stripes our fractured relationships could be healed!

Today, will you ask God to free you from independence or co-dependency and admit that you're dependent on Him first and foremost?

Will you make thing right with God and others? Let's pray.