

Relationships – A Mess Worth Making
Pastor Deborah Oakley – GFC - July 2, 2017

Today is the first message in a series entitled “Relationships A Mess Worth Making.” That is also the title of today’s message. It’s based on a book of the same name and we really recommend you read it.

I just love the title because there are times when all of us feel like relationships aren’t worth the mess. It seems easier to be alone than to navigate the minefield of relationships. So as soon as things get messy we back off or end the relationship.

I have seen so many people begin a new relationship only to end it in disillusionment and disappointment. Why? Because it didn’t take long to realize their new friend had issues. The same person who was so caring, accepting, and fun to be with was also sometimes judgmental, negative or insensitive. Suddenly things aren’t so fun...as a matter of fact things are downright difficult and messy.

I want to say to that person, “What were you expecting, did you think this person was perfect?” Seriously, “Did you think they didn’t have any faults or weaknesses or that they wouldn’t sin against you?” I want to say, “Haven’t we taught you anything?” Better yet I want to say “Do you think you’re perfect?” I wonder what your new friend is thinking about you.

Here’s the point. Relationships are messy because we’re all flawed and imperfect and we sin against each other. Relationships are messy because we’re a mess. Your best relationships are messy.

However, as messy as they are, relationships are a mess worth making. In Christ relationships can be healed and meaningful. They can be the source of love and joy that God intended. They can be more fulfilling than before they were ruptured by sin.

That’s because even though relationships are messy they are also what God uses to rescue us from ourselves. It is through relationships that God shows us our inability to love others without His love and grace.

We are all sinners with the capacity to do a lot of damage to ourselves and others...and that’s why we need God’s grace. His grace is our hope for loving relationships. Our hope doesn’t rest on our abilities or strength or experience. Our hope rests on Jesus Christ.

God can take the mess we’ve made in relationships and use it to shape us and make us more like him. Right in the middle of our mess we can find great love and lasting hope. That’s one reason relationships are a mess worth making.

So let's look at SEVEN BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

1- GOD CREATED US FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships can be the source of our greatest pain and our deepest joy. There are times when we wish we could just be alone and other times when we thank God we're not alone.

But the truth remains that God created us for relationship. Even though we are flawed people in flawed relationships we are created to be social beings. Community with each other is part of our humanity. We are less than what God created us to be when we are isolated. Genesis 2:18 says:

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

God created us to need each other. 1 Corinthians 12:20-21 says:

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

The Bible tells us over and over how much we need one another. It says we should:

- Love one another (mentioned 17 times)
- Greet one another
- Bear one another's burdens
- Forgive, comfort and exhort one another
- Admonish one another
- Submit to one another
- Have peace with one another
- Accept, wait for, care for and serve one another.
- Be kind to one another
- Speak to one another
- Teach one another
- Edify, consider and confess to one another
- Pray for one another
- Have compassion for one another
- Be hospitable, minister to and fellowship with one another

There's no denying that God created us for relationship with one another. After all, God Himself is relational and we are created in His image. In Gen. 1:26 God says *Let US make man in OUR image, in OUR likeness.*

Notice the main verb is plural. Let US make man in OUR image. God isn't an individual...He's three in one. God lives in community within the trinity – The Father, Son and Holy Spirit which exist as one. And the trinity is the model for community.

In the trinity we see a loving and unified community where diversity is an asset and not a liability. That's what community is...a unified body of individuals.

God exists in community, and we are made in His image, therefore we also must exist in community. Community isn't an option, it's what we are created for. Only when we live in community do we fully reflect the image of God. It's in community that we love one another and we all need to be loved.

However, the only way we will ever be able to love each other is if we first love God. God must be first and others second. If you are falling short of loving others you can be sure you are falling short in your relationship with God.

In Matthew 22:36-39 one of the Pharisees asked Jesus a question.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Notice there's a proper order here. Jesus first - others second. Relationship problems occur when we reverse this order and put second things first. We know we have put others before God when we struggle with:

- Letting go of hurts and unforgiveness.
- Becoming defensive when challenged or wronged.
- Avoiding conflict out of fear.
- Being resigned to broken relationships that could be healed.
- Lying.
- Pursuing comfortable relationships and avoiding difficult ones.
- Doubting God when relationships are messy.
- Being jealous of other people's friendships.
- Trying to control.
- Blowing up when we don't get our way.
- Isolating when feeling disappointed.

We must put first things first. And, we need God's help to do it.

You see, every painful thing we experience in relationships is meant to remind us of our need for God. And, God wants us to see relationships the way that He sees them.

2. In one way or another, all relationships experience difficulties.

Even the best of relationships have problems and pain. If you are in a relationship you will soon discover that relationships don't always deliver what you expect. Here's why:

In Genesis 2 God creates man in His image.

In Genesis 3 sin enters into relationships when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit. This brings confusion, frustration, accusation, slander and sin into every relationship from then on.

In Genesis 4 Cain kills his brother Abel and we see the ultimate result of sin in relationships...which is death.

No wonder our relationships are so messy. Our struggle with sin is always present in them. And that's why we need Christ to help us - so we can rise above the mess.

3- There are no secrets to problem free relationships.

A healthy relationship isn't determined by a lack of problems but by how we deal with the problems. When you have two imperfect people who are struggling with sin you are going to have problems.

There are no quick fixes to remove the pain of problems. The good news is that God will use our problems to make us more like Him so we can have healthy, loving, and meaningful relationship.

4- At some point you will wonder if relationships are worth it.

For example:

- A husband and wife choose a divorce over the pain of constant disappointment and fighting all the time.
- A friend stops opening up because others just don't understand her and really don't seem to care.
- A co-worker doesn't have time for friendships outside of work because life is just too busy.
- Family get-togethers are strained because of hurt feelings and offenses that can't seem to get resolved.

All of us can get discouraged and want to give up on relationships. But a good relationship means both people admit their sin, forgive and trust God to heal the relationship...instead of taking the easy way out.

Please hear me: I'm not saying there isn't a time to leave a relationship...but that's not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about how you deal with problems. Do you blame, deny, run away, avoid, threaten, and manipulate? Or do you speak the truth, show patience, forgive, and serve?

5- God uses messy relationships for His redemptive purpose.

The very thing we try to avoid – which is messy relationships - is the very thing that God can use to make us more like Him. In reality God can use difficult relationships to bring us to the end of ourselves and to show us how much we need Him.

You see, God probably isn't going to change the relationship...instead He's going to change us right in the midst of the relationship. Listen, I'm not talking about staying in an abusive relationship. I'm talking about doing everything we can to save a relationship.

We think that if God really cared He would just fix things right now. We want Him to change the relationship, but He wants to change us. When we change – relationships change! Proverbs 27:17 says:

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

You see our problems have a redemptive purpose. They expose our sin and selfishness. Right in the middle of the mess we are forced to look at our own hearts. Have you ever noticed how you can be doing just fine until someone upsets you or pushes your button? All of a sudden all this junk starts coming out. James 3:10 says:

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

God redeems messy relationships by showing us what's in our hearts so He can make us more like Him.

6. The fact that our relationships work as well as they do is a sure sign of grace.

One of the biggest hindrances in relationships is that we don't see our own sin. Oh we can see everyone else's but when it comes to our own sin we have blind spots.

Many years ago I discovered one of my blind spots. I had a disagreement with a close friend who said I was being harsh. It really hurt my feelings so I called my husband to get sympathy. But instead of sympathy, he agreed with my friend. "Well" I thought "What does he know."

So, I called my dear friend and mentor Anne. I was certain she would sympathize with me. But she too agreed with my friend.

"OK," I thought. "I'll give it one more try." So I called another one of my friends and to my utter dismay, she also agreed.

At that moment I was devastated. I hung up the phone and I cried out to God. Three people who loved me had all said the same thing. I knew it had to be true. So right then and there I repented.

That day was a turning point in my life...because of God's redemptive Grace. It changed me forever – *some of you are wondering about that.* Seriously, I still have to guard myself from being harsh but I'm nothing close to how I use to be. If it had not been for these friends, God's redeeming grace and my willingness to change - I may not have ever recognized my sin.

Yes, we all have blind spots that threaten to destroy our relationships but we also have the grace of God to protect us from ourselves. Just like Elisha's servant in 2 Kings 6:15. All he saw was the enemy army that surrounded him - until God opened his eyes to see the army of angels God sent to deliver him.

Yes, the enemy is always at work to destroy your relationships. But God is also at work to deliver you. By God's grace you can rise up and overcome. 1 John 4:4 says:

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

7- There is hope for our relationships.

Here's the truth...none of us get to be in relationships with a finished person. If you fail to see this you become impatient, critical, and judgmental. If you accept it you can rise above the challenges - you can love - and you can have hope. You can rise up in spite of the pain...and you can do it a thousand times again if you have to.

Your problems may seem like an un-moveable mountain, but Matthew 17:20 says:

You can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

By the grace of God you can move mountains, you can rise up, you can fight, and you can overcome.

Relationships are messy...but they are a mess worth making.
Because you were created for community.
Because God wants to redeem the mess you're in.

There is hope for your relationships:
Your marriage can be saved.
Your family can be restored.
Your friendships can be healed.

All of us are crippled one way or another in relationships.
We all sometimes feel like we're giving more than we're getting back.
We want low cost and high return relationships.
But God wants high personal cost and high returns.
He has called us to be patient and to love and serve one another no matter what.

Will you rise up?
Will you move mountains in your relationships?
Will you love and serve others?
With God's help, you can love others even when it feels you're doing most of the giving!