

Building Healthy Relationships 1/14/18

Introduction

Hanny made a profound observation last month which sets the stage for our winter/spring sermon series: “What does it take to build healthy relationships?” She said, “It’s a good thing I’m learning so much about my own needs and hurts before I get into a serious relationship for marriage. If I bring all my baggage into that relationship, it is sure to be very troubled.” She is right.

So, to begin our sermon series, we start with examining our roots. What are the factors in our past that are driving or affecting our relationships in the present? Often these factors keep us from loving ourselves. So after we get healing from the pain of these memories, we are more ready to build healthy relationships with others. In the Bible there are at least 25 one anothers in the New Testament. They will give structure to our series on what is involved in building healthy relationships.

So, to start the series we need to go back to our roots. We start with David Seamand’s book *Healing for Damaged Emotions*. But lest this topic seem too heavy, I want to tell you a joke I just got online: A man wrote: “Recently, I called to make reservations on a small charter plane that departs from our equally small airport. I knew that I would be flying in a very small plane, so I was not surprised when the clerk said, “The plane is very full with baggage and passengers.” Then she asked, “How much do you weigh, sir?”

Not thinking clearly I answered, “With or without clothes?”

“Well,” said the clerk, “how do you intend to travel?”(GCFN 1/12/18) My, oh my. Let’s pray.

Sermon:

In Seamand’s book he uses the analogy of the rings on giant sequoias. These rings record a tree’s “developmental history year by year. Here is a ring that represents the year there was a terrible drought. Here are a couple of rings, where there’s too much rain. Here the tree was struck by lightning. Here are some normal years of growth. “This ring shows the forest fire that almost destroyed the tree. Here is another, showing savage blight and disease... That’s the way for us... In the recorded rings of our lives, there are scars of ancient painful hurts... that deeply affect our concepts, our feelings, our relationships. They affect the way we look at life and God, at others and ourselves. (Seamands,p.12 of healing for damaged)

“Some damaged emotions play out in the deep sense of unworthiness. Some play out in the perfectionistic complex, some in super-sensitivity with the continue need of approval, some in fears, some in shame” (Seamands, pp. 13, 15-18). Some in a feeling of abandonment when one or both parents were never there to be with us, play with us, affirm us. As a result, although “many of us believe in a good theology of grace, that’s not the way we live...The failure to see and know and feel grace drives many Christians to the treadmills of performing, achieving and striving... to get rid of their guilt and atone to pay their debts.” (Seamands pp. 29, 30, 34)



That treadmill of performing and achieving is powered by the “Super You, which is a perfectionistic picture of the self we feel we need to be for people to accept us and love us (p. 103). The Super You can’t be angry, that is a negative emotion. But that’s a false understanding. Yes, we can be angry – Paul even tells the Ephesians *be angry but do not sin.*” (Eph.4:19) The issue is how we resolve the anger so it doesn’t turn into resentment or bitterness. If you don’t resolve broken relationships, the inner emotions will stay inside, “doing a slow burn,” and we try to get even in a thousand and one subtle ways” (p.107). Super You also has the notion that you ought to always get along with everybody, be liked by everybody and that there should never be conflict between Christians (p.107).

But here is the good news of the gospel – news that is often ignored: “Jesus came and took all our infirmities to the cross (Hebrews 4:15) *He is touched with our feelings of infirmities*. The word ‘strength’ is *sthenos*- the word infirmities is *astheneia*, meaning a lack of strength, a weakness, a crippling. In the New Testament this word refers to mental, moral and emotional weaknesses. Jesus understands- we don’t have to bear them alone. (Seamands, p.39)

Satan’s greatest psychological weapon against Christians is low self-worth..., lack in faith in God is often fed by under-estimating what God wants to do through you. “If a person has had neglect, criticism, perfectionistic demands and lack of affection, it affects how h/she sees herself – her self - image. Satan is a liar, an accuser, and one who blinds our minds. He wants Christians to stay bound to their hurts and false images from their past.(Seamands, pp. 53, 73)

Therefore, beloved, I think it’s critical that we recognize God’s wisdom in the Great Commandment and its corollary is to *Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and then to love our neighbor as ourselves*. It’s the “as ourselves” part where so many get hung up. If we have damaged emotions, if we have experienced abandonment or a ‘perfect you’ standard or abuse or shame, invariably we won’t be able to love ourselves. And if we can’t do that, how can we love others? We will only bring our damaged selves into a relationship and expect the other person to love us and heal us in ways no human being is capable of. We have to love ourselves before we can love others.

So how do we deal with the issues we realize lie inside of us? It takes courage to admit them. That’s step one, but then we need to deal with them. And this takes more courage – courage and strength which God can give you when you ask. This is where those in the counseling profession are such a help to us as Christians. They are trained to help people discover their root issues and then help them think through different responses to those triggering events so they don’t continue to negatively drive our behavior and thoughts.

They help us do what Paul advocated in Romans 12:1-2. After we have submitted ourselves to God and determined not to let the old patterns of thought dominate us, we start the process of having *the Spirit renew our mind* –

- Jesus can build in us a positive self-image – so that we see Jesus in us. He can replace new thoughts of our value and God’s love for us with the old thoughts of the Super You or its opposite, the low self-esteem,
- He can replace the neglected fearful child with the scriptures which declare that God will never *leave us or abandon us* – *He values us* – *He rejoices over His children with loud singing*. (Zephaniah 3:17).
- He can replace the shame from our past as we realize Jesus put it on the cross and then rose victorious over it.

This replacing is what’s involved in renewing our minds. It happens when we immerse ourselves in scripture. As He does this we can develop a positive self-esteem so we see ourselves as God sees us. We can be ourselves, accept and value ourselves, forgive ourselves bless ourselves, express ourselves, trust ourselves, love ourselves and thus empower ourselves.” This is all the work of the Holy Spirit when we ask for His help.

To do that, I want us to sing the song: Heal me hands of Jesus as we contemplate some areas of our lives that needs the touch of God. Heal me, hands of Jesus, and search out all my pain; Restore my hope, remove my fear and bring me peace again. Know me, mind of Jesus, And show me all my sin; Dispel the memories of guilt, And bring me peace within. Fill me, joy of Jesus: Anxiety shall cease And heaven’s serenity be mine, For Jesus brings me peace!” (by Mark Hall).

The way God does that healing is most often through the scriptures.

Think about Jesus' interactions with people and how he performed miracles for them – because he saw their pain and reached out and touched them or absolved their shame and guilt. I think of Peter with his denial, the woman at the well and the paralytic by the pool of Siloam.

We start with Peter. Jesus had forecast that Peter would deny him and Peter had vehemently denied it. He hadn't understood what the pressure of Jesus' arrest and possible death would mean to him. He could be next and in his fear and confusion he denied his Lord. He had just proclaimed Jesus as Messiah but suddenly in that courtyard all his bravado and actual faith in Christ and leadership among the other disciples came crashing down at his feet. Jesus even heard his denial and so Peter's shame and guilt was multiplied to a heart-breaking level. Yet, Jesus had already known this weakness in Peter and had told him that He had prayed for Peter and would restore him – even in the leadership of the church. He did that in his encounter with Peter at the seashore after Jesus' resurrection. Shame, guilt and desperate failure.

The woman at the well also knew shame. Her lifestyle with serial lovers was well-known in her village and so she had been ostracized and branded, perhaps as a prostitute. She wasn't able to come draw water in the early morning and early evening hours with the other women and so had come to the well in the heat of the day. Yet Jesus initiated a conversation with her, gave her respect and answered her questions before revealing what he knew of her shameful lifestyle. Although she was disgraced in her village, Jesus revealed himself to her and God used her witness to help convert an entire village. Jesus gave her back a place and respect.

The paralytic by the pool of Siloam was apparently drowning in self-pity. He had been paralyzed for 38 years and yet as time went forward and no one helped him into the healing waters, he had lost all hope. Jesus' penetrating question: *Do you want to be healed?* seems odd, but Jesus was actually targeting an inner emotion that traps many people today – we can stay stuck in a dysfunctional attitude or relationship because we don't know anything else but our situation of infirmity so we don't see any alternatives. But God always sees beyond our limits and offers the new vistas of His perspective and wholeness if we will receive it. Jesus gave this paralytic a command which necessitated that he put all those emotions behind him and do the impossible thing Jesus commanded: *Get up, pick up your mat and walk.*”Jn.5:1-11 And he did!!

Jesus saw the turmoil in emotions that was breaking each person and his touch and words were what freed that person from their bondage and made them whole again. Jesus is Jehovah Rapha – the Lord our healer. He can meet us in whatever extremity has bruised or broken part of us inside. Once he receive His deliverance or new perspective or obey His command to get up and put this past behind us, he will make us whole and then we can begin to love ourselves again.

This means we can come as wounded healers into our relationships – free to admit our areas of weakness and pain and forgiveness. And then because we have been forgiven and healed by God, we can offer that forgiveness and healing and grace to others. We come with humility, not judgement as others fail us and we fail them. We come with God's mercy and grace.

This is why the prayer Paul had for the Ephesians is so important for us to pray for ourselves and for each other: 3:17-19. *¹⁷I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

May it be so, beloved, in each of us – for Jesus' sake.

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