

Is This It? Isn't There Something More?

"Is There More To Relationships?"

(Part 2)

Intro: I've never met someone yet who hasn't been disillusioned about relationships.

(Years ago I was investing a lot of time in a ministry leader. I would drive to Milwaukee and have lunch – Months went by – then one day he said there were some things he wanted to talk to me about...explain) I was blindsided – the relationship never recovered.

It seems everyone has a story about a relationship that has gone south / marriage fell apart / friendship disintegrated / relationship simply lost. We've all been disappointed / let down / dissatisfied / and wounded through relationships. So, what's the deal? Is this just the way relationships are? Is there something more we can experience relationally?

- In our fast-paced age of technology, it seems we have lost a sense of community. We don't need to talk face to face, we can text / twitter / email / instant message / We may be connected to the world wide web, but we have lost the ability to connect with each other's hearts. Is there really more or have we gone too far?
- The answer is YES. There is so much more God would have us experience relationally.

I. What We Experience Relationally Depends On Which Kingdom We Embrace

A. We must reject the relational values of this earthly kingdom

1. Relationships are optional
 - We can survive without them. You really can be an island and stand alone.
2. Relationships are disposable
 - If you don't like the one you're in, find a new one. Move on. Be happy. Find a new friend / spouse / partner /
3. Relationships are unattainable
 - Happily ever after and story book endings don't exist. This is as good as it gets. Relationships may start out good, but they always fade. That's life!
4. Relationships digress
 - They do not get better with time. They usually get worse. Therefore, enjoy them while they last...because they won't.
5. Relationships are utilitarian
 - As long as the relationship benefits me I will stay in it. When it no longer benefits me I am out. We use people for our own gratification.
6. Relationships don't impact success
 - You don't need healthy relationships to be successful in this life. You can climb to the top by yourself. In fact, you use people as stepping stones to success.
7. Relationships do not make up this earthly kingdom
 - This kingdom is about money / possessions / power / pride / influence / status / pleasure. It's not about loving relationships.
8. Relationships are temporary.

- All relationship will fail sooner or later

If we embrace one or more of these earthly relational values, we will be disillusioned in our relationships. Be careful! Don't be so quick in assuming you don't embrace any of these. The influence of this world can be very subtle. And very strong.

Consider your relationships / how you really treat people / how you think about people / how you talk about people before you answer. You just might be surprised. The proof of what you really believe is in the quality of your relationships.

B. We must embrace the relational values of God's Kingdom

- Notice they are completely opposite of this world.
1. Relationships are essential to our existence
 - Gen. 1-2 ,God created us as relational beings. It's part of our design. Genesis tells us that loneliness wasn't good thing. We are made for loving relationships.
 2. Relationships are priceless possessions
 - Mark 12:29-31 The greatest commands are relational commands and the greatest sacrifice was a relational sacrifice. (Jesus on the cross) Relationships are priceless to Him. God put a price on us when He sacrificed His Son.
 3. Relationships are attainable and required
 - This is why Jesus gave His disciples a "New Command" to love each other as He loved them. He was showing them what was possible relationally. He was also teaching them that loving relationships are NOT optional...command!
 4. Relationships can grow and improve

Eph. 4:16 "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." (NLT)

 - All of this happens in the context of growing relationships. This is the environment of the church that has to exist for it to be healthy.
 5. Relationships are selfless

Phil. 2:3 "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves." (NLT)

 - In God's kingdom, it's not about what you can do, it's all about what you can help others do. It's not about your success. It's helping others be successful!
 6. Relationships are the standard for success
 - If the greatest commands are relational commands, then the greatest success in this life would be to live these out effectively in our relationships. If we blow relationships, we will waste our lives!
 7. Relationships make up the Kingdom of God
 - God's entire plan to rescue humanity was relational!
John 3:16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (NLT)

- If we don't value relationships, we don't value His Kingdom! The Kingdom of God is made up of those Jesus died for.

8. Relationships are eternal

- We get to enjoy each other forever! These relationships we establish in this life will continue into eternity. We might as well get it figured out here in this life!
- We will never experience more in our relationships until we embrace the relational values of God's Kingdom. Which Kingdom do you really embrace?
- The irony of most churches and Christians is they claim to be part of God's Kingdom but so often live the values of this earthly kingdom. (Reputation of churches is they can't get along – statistics for divorce is no different for Christians than unchurched.)
- If we want to embrace the values of God's Kingdom so we can experience more in our relationships, there is a path to walk. There are relational steps to walk in.

II. What We Experience Relationally Depends On What Path We Walk

I Thess. 2:12 "We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory." (NLT)

- God wants us to live in a way that is consistent with the kingdom we belong to. Let me share with you some Kingdom steps to more. Let me plead / encourage / urge you today!

A. God's Relational Steps To More

(Notice the word "practice" is used each time. These steps take practice!)

1. Practice forgiveness

Eph. 4:32 "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (NLT)

- Forgiveness must be a reality in our relationships because we are imperfect people. We will all fail relationally at one time or another. Without forgiveness, all relationships will fail. All hope is removed.
- Forgiveness renews. It can renew the relationship and it renews our heart to love again. Without it, our hearts stay stuck in the wound...they stay stuck in the past. ..we become emotional prisoners to everyone who ever let us down.
- Forgiveness is the path that allows us to experience more. Some of you are not experiencing more because you're stuck in unforgiveness.

2. Practice truth

Eph. 4:25 "So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." (NLT)

- Great relationships are built on honesty. Unfortunately, we have all developed this skill for falsehood. What do I mean? We project the image we want people to see. We've become good actors to cover up our insecurities / fears / wounds and pain.
- It is our emotional honesty that connects our hearts with another person. The more we hide the truth of who we really are the lonelier and more isolated we become.

- Some of you are dying relationally because you're hiding behind a façade, yet it's this false image that is killing your relationships. (Some people I can't get close to. I can't identify with a person who never has problems.)

3. Practice grace

Col. 4:6 "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive..." (NLT)

Heb. 12:15 "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." (NIV)

- There is a lot I could say about being a person filled with grace. Grace is simply favor that we give to others that is not based upon their performance. It's not earned.
- Police officer that pulled me over by the Y. – Explain
- Are we gracious individuals by nature or do people have to earn our time / our forgiveness / our resources / patience / How do you respond when people fall short of your expectations? (Grocery store checker / True Value – working out parking issues over the years – story of guy flipping them off...)
- Grace is like oil in an engine. It keeps everything lubricated / reduces friction / makes the parts last longer / Grace does this with relationships.

4. Practice humility

1 Peter 5:5 "... And all of you, serve each other in humility, for "God opposes the proud but favors the humble." (NLT)

- For some of you it is your pride that has destroyed your relationships. It is more important for you to be right than it is to have a right relationship.
 - For some, this is manifested in control issues. Your lack of humility causes you to want to control the lives / behaviors / thinking of others. It's easy to know if you have control issues. Ask those around you if you manipulate and control!
 - Humility causes us to serve people not control people. Humility accepts that others think differently / feel differently / behave differently than we do. Humility helps to create an atmosphere of acceptance in relationships. (working with city)

5. Practice selflessness

Phil. 2:4-5 "Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had." (NLT)

- When was the last time you did something completely selfless for someone else expecting nothing in return? When did you take an interest in the life of another?
- This world is concerned about "what's in it for me?" We should be concerned about, "what's in it for them?" What are their needs? This was Jesus' attitude.
- In the NT there are 58 "one another" commands...selfless commands.
- Some of you are thinking; 'Why didn't you say LOVE?' Because if we walk in these steps we will be doing the loving thing. This is what love looks like. These are the practical steps of loving relationships.
- Some of you may be thinking it is impossible to live this way. Trying to do this by yourself it is! These are Kingdom relationships. These happen only under God's power.

B. God's Relational Power for More

I Cor. 4:20 "For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power." (NASB)

God's kingdom is not just about the words. There is real power behind what He says! This power is real for us to live this way.

1. Relational power begins with a relationship with God

Col. 1:13 "For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son." (NLT)

- We only receive Kingdom power if we're in His Kingdom. Therefore, everything about relationships begins with a relationship with God. It's impossible to try to live this way without it.
- The only way to be transferred from one kingdom to another is by accepting Jesus Christ into our lives. Only He can rescue us. We can't rescue ourselves.
- If you really desire your relationships to be transformed it begins by accepting a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. He said He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It all starts with Him. You can start this relationship today!

2. Relational power is maintained by dependence on God

John 15:5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." (NLT)

- Part of this fruit that we produce are the relationships we experience.
- If we want our relationships to change then we have to depend on God for the power to change us and them. HOW? We have to learn how to "remain"...stay connected.
- HOW?
- Pray every day to be empowered to live this way. I ask God every day to help me love my wife and kids. I know I can't do it alone.
- Know what His word says about relationships. The Bible is a book about relationships! (Try reading Proverbs and follow it's relational instructions)
- This is how we stop living independently from God (prayer and His word)

3. Relational power grows as we continually walk with God

II Thess. 1:3 "Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing." (NLT)

Contrary to the world's perspective, love can grow and flourish.

- As we continue to walk this path with God, there isn't diminishing power from God there is a multiplying of God's power in our relationships. The more we walk in it the more we get. The longer we walk it the more we experience
- I have said this for years...People quit the path too soon! It's hard changing the way we do relationships. It's hard depending on God to live them His way. You just have to decide not to quit. Your faith will flourish and your love will grow if you keep walking with God.

- It's like working out physically. It hard / tough / not fun at times / wonder if it's doing any good. BUT, if you keep at it, your capacity for exercise increases. You get in better shape. You get stronger / lift more / more endurance / feel better
- If you stay on this course with God He will increase your capacity for relationships...you will be able to love more / have more grace / humility / more selfless / etc..

God doesn't want you disillusioned about relationships. He wants you to delight in them. That is what we are designed for. The question is; Which Kingdom do you really embrace...and which path do you really walk? There really is more!