

INTRODUCTION:

As the staff started this week off, we did so as we've been doing for the last few weeks by reflecting on the things that God has done in and through this church, the interactions we've had with people in and out of the body that have been impactful and the ways we are going to attack the week and make the most of our time. At the end of this meeting, I was able to share a devotion that one of my mentors shared with me not too long ago about self-awareness in our spiritual lives. In my mentors observation, there are 8 barriers to getting to know your true self well ... and the last one is the one that I shared with the staff and the one I'll share with you know. We keep ourselves from investigating our God-designed soul the most when we have a *distant relationship* with the Trinity. Unwilling to go to the Father in faith, abide in Jesus or be comforted by the Spirit. *A distant relationship with the Trinity*. Yet the depth of thinking about having a distant relationship with God was heavy to me. At a time in history where you can have 3000 friends on social media... yet have very little social interaction with people... the words *distant relationship* were convicting. And even still, there is a part in me, much like a part of all of us that is hesitant and a bit afraid of truly intimate relationships with people. Because often times we see how we relate to people as the measuring stick to how we view ourselves. So it can become easier to not relate to them. Or to have faux friendships. Or to only go ankle deep in intimacy... because all of these are easier to maintain. We would rather have distant relationships that to deal with what is reflected about us in close ones.

Romans 12, much like Ephesians 5&6, 1 Corinthians 11-15, Colossians 3 and almost every other epistle shows that although we need relationship, we desire it, we are always in relationship with others ... we are terrible at it. Matter of fact, most of Paul's writings to churches can be summed up in "Here's how we deal with your theology and here's how you treat people in light of it." And as Paul pens the words "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" he emphasizes a way to do so. In stewarding, not just our lives, time, and gifts ... but also our relationships. But if that is true... how do we manage our relationships well ... and why does God care enough to give them to us and make them such an important issue to deal with in the scriptures? **We are entrusted to one another by God's design and to display His righteousness.**

I. Relationships are a gift from God.

Let me start by giving a definition of what I mean when I say relationships that will frame our time together. For the sake of dealing with how we as Christians should relate to others, there are five relationship types that we see in the Bible that hold great importance. Hear me in saying these are not ranked with levels of more or less importance but simply a list of different kinds of relationship that require different amounts of our spiritual, emotional, mental and even physical attention

- (1) Marriage
- (2) Parenthood
- (3) Christian Community
- (4) Friendships
- (5) Relationships with our fellow man

And in knowing that this message is about stewardship and being entrusted with what God is given us, my first point is simple. **Relationships are a gift from God.** Genesis 2 tells this beautiful story of the creation of man and God recognizing man's need to be able to relate, even before he tried to. Genesis 2:18, God says "It is not good that man be alone..." and in the 21st verse he puts Adam to sleep to handcraft a perfect person for him to be in relationship with. God's grace is so evident in the fact that his gift was one that was much needed. Adam went to work, naming the animals and seeing them paired together as equals but uniquely different. Complementing one another. God gave Adam a gift that was perfect for him and one that he actually had a deep seeded need for. **Illustration:**

Whether it's spouses, children, parents, our church, discipleship relationships like Paul & Timothy, friendships like David & Jonathan, or interactions with people we don't know like the nomads, foreigners and common human being. God has designed us with the desire to relate to others and many times he fills the need of relationship through his giving of real people. **RELATIONSHIPS ARE A GIFT FROM GOD.**

Romans 12: 9-21

A gift ... like any other gift from God that requires us to give to, nurture and develop. But do we even look at the people in our lives as gifts? Maybe if we have a great marriage and are obsessed with our kids but what about the person who is struggling to uphold their end of the friendship? What about the husband who has lost zeal in loving his wife? What about when we are approached by strangers or we're moody and we don't be bothered, even by our friends? In times where we are killing it and our lives are put together well and times where we are at our absolute lowest, God gifts us people to be able to relate to... and we have a responsibility to steward our relationships well.

II. Sinful desire rips us from right relationship

The need to be able to relate to people well was a primary concern to Paul and it should be to us. And although I don't know every one of your lives or what you are dealing with I do know that the Bible gives a myriad of examples of botched relationships. Ones where God gifted people to one another even in jacked up situations.

- God sent Hosea to love and show grace to a wife that wouldn't love him back
- Joseph was in a family that sent him into slavery by God's grace becomes an official in Egypt and saves his family from famine even after they abandoned him
- Saul gets knocked off of a horse, meets Jesus, and is accepted into a group believers after some time because God sent and advocate for him in Ananias... even though he once threatened their lives
- David had a best friend whose dad hated his guts and wanted to kill him but he was protected by God's grace and loved by his friend.
- And a man who was rejected socially because his socio-ethnic background had enough compassion to bandage an injured Jew who would have hated him had he not been incapacitated, took him to an inn to stay and paid for it as he recovered ,in a parable where Jesus is asking religious people who they should love as much as they love themselves.

All of these are examples are of imperfect and sinful people relating to other imperfect sinful people. Even the grace givers in the examples were sinners. Our inability to have strong relationships on our own comes from our own fallenness.

Entrusted to One Another

4

Romans 12: 9-21

There are times where we may not be the person bringing all of the dysfunction to the party but we are likely responsible for some of it. And that's because of sin. Sin is offensive and self-seeking and the root of all conflict, unrest and division in relationships. It causes us to turn inward instead of turning to God, essentially looking to take the place of God in being worshipped. And you and I desire godship ... those around us... if we are honest... are just people that have to serve as our worshippers. Nothing sours a relationship like selfishness. Yet selfishness isn't a character flaw. It is a symptom of the sickness of sin.

For the sake of continuity, let's go back to Genesis and revisit the story of Creation and roll into what's called the Fall of Man. The perfect painting of godly relationship was told in Genesis 2 with God creating the perfect partner for man. BOOM. Sin enters into the world and two relationships became marred. The relationship between Adam and his wife ... ruined by blame shifting and bad leadership. And the even greater relationship... the one between the Creator and the created was broken. No longer was there union. The signs of broken relationship arose. Adam runs and hides. He and his wife feel shame. God asks "Where are you?", a question directed at Adam and one that was relational, not geographical. And every rolls down hill from there, like a U-haul truck in San Francisco that didn't put it's parking break on. The selfishness of man ... seeking to please himself over honoring and serving those he was in relationship with led to generations of dysfunction, murder, jealousy, stealing, greed, war, and death.

I thought this message was supposed to be about how to keep up with our relationships. Yes it is. But we can never forget that the root of all of the dysfunction in our relationships of all kinds, is sin. **SIN RIPS US FROM RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.** And in every book of the bible ... in marriages, families, gatherings of people of faith, companionships and relationships with common human beings... this story is told. Over and over and over... We, instead of looking to God for our identity, worth and satisfaction ... look inward. Neglecting to acknowledge the God that made us and serve those he has given us. Instead we attempt make them the Cheif Servant and Worshipper in our hearts.

Romans 12: 9-21

So when Paul is writing a letter to the believers in Rome about how to deal with their issues of division, prejudice, hypocrisy and haughtiness, amongst other things, he wrote with a prescription in mind. One that he'd given all of the other churches he'd visited too. Romans 1, he says he's eager to share THE GOSPEL because in it God's righteousness is revealed. And in Romans 5, he tells them where Adam, the representative of man, caused a falling out of right relationship with God by sin... God in all his grace, gives another gift to man. Jesus Christ. Living sin free, taking sin on in his death, being raised from death and ascending to where the Father is. And as he enjoys a perfect relationship with God the Father, he stands righteous in front of Him, justifying all of whom he's in relationship with by faith. Paul wants the Romans to know that Jesus is righteousness before God the Father; the righteousness that they could never produce. He gives everyone who believes in Him a new identity ... one that allows them to be back into relationship with their Creator. ***The first relationship that is restored in the life of a Christian is the one between them and God.*** And from chapter 1 to chapter 11, Paul gives them a deep theology of what to understand about their newly repaired relationship with God. And starting in chapter 12, he tells them what their changed relationship impacts how they relate to others. As Pastor Larry mentioned in week one of the series when he referenced Romans 12:1-2 ... we cannot discuss Christian stewardship without acknowledging that we must give our selves to death so that we can live IN CHRIST. The only way to steward time, money, relationships and our lives is by letting Christ live in us and us in Christ. And as we do that, we display God's righteousness as members of Christ.

III. Godly relationships display the righteousness of God by living in Christ

At first I felt like I could just end this sermon by reading verses 9-13 or 9-21 and say... Now go out, live as Christ lived and do these things. Sometimes that is exactly how my mind operates. But after reading the exhortations a few times, I realized... that for the person struggling in their marriage or as a parent... in a friendship or struggling to get in relationship with other Christians... this is still a bit vague. I realized that Paul gave these instructions like he was writing them out for IKEA. Have y'all ever struggled with the demon of instructions from IKEA??? For those of you who don't know ... IKEA has some of the most

Romans 12: 9-21

beautiful and simplistic furniture in the world ... but then instructions... (smh). They just send you a paper that gives you a visual of each step of assembly but it doesn't tell you exactly how the assembly happens. It's almost like they are saying... if it looks like this you may be going in the right direction.

1. Christ displayed through genuine love

- a) The first exhortation Paul gives is to **love genuinely** or as it breaks down in the Greek. Love without hypocrisy. A pastor and theologian you may or may not have heard of named Charles Haddon Spurgeon says it like this *“Do not pretend to a love that you have not got. Do not lard your speech with “dear” this and “dear” that, when there is no love in your heart; and even if your heart be full of love, show it without spreading molasses over your talk, as some do.* “ This is for our marriages, families, friendships and of course in our churches.
- b) The next two are **Hate what is evil and love what is good**. Too often we don't call out the evil in the lives of those we are closest with because it could affect their feelings about us but the combination of hating what is evil and loving what is good is refreshing and adds what we would call balance to a relationship. Amos 5:15 and Psalm 97:10 both share these married exhortations of hating the things that we know are not of God and embracing the things that are. Amongst strangers this could be awkward but amongst people who have know each other for years, this can continually add oil to the creaky spots in our interactions with others. Foster relationships that are eager in calling out sin and quick to celebrate right living.

2. Christ displayed through spiritual vitality

- a) Then Paul shows how Christ can be displayed through our spiritual vitality. In the section above, we see that the spiritual gifts of the believers in the church will bless those in the church but then he adds the exhortations of **love one another with brotherly affection and outdo one another in showing honor**. This is Paul's way of saying have a strong kindred spirit among you like best-friends and siblings would. He uses two words that work together to maximize

the idea of affection that we are to have for one another in the church. And if marriages and families are under the church, then we should love our spouses, parents, and children with brotherly affection in concert with the love that those in union share. And as it comes to honor ... value others over yourself. Our values are evident in our lives and we live in a society, much like the Romans ... that says protect, preserve, give to, encourage, nurture yourself and if you have the bandwidth ... do what you can for others. Yet one of the most evident signs of division between God's design for relationships and the natural ones is the ability to value others over yourself.

READ ROMANS 12:11-13

We aren't giving a good picture of what Jesus would have us do if we are not eager and show excitement about serving God. Paul addresses laziness in the church a few times but this is him saying be spiritually on fire for God and let that be evident within your Christian community. The believers in Rome didn't have much to rejoice. They weren't exactly popular for being followers of Christ. And I know this is probably premature but Christendom in the United States seems like it might be making a turn where we may not feel like there is nothing to rejoice about but through persecution and wars and all types of testing of our spirit, we are to steward our relationships with other Christians and more importantly, our local church by constantly praying for it, being quick to give to those in need and showing hospitality.

3. Christ displayed through harmonious living

- a) I think that would spill over into the world and display Christianity in a light that most would be challenged by. A people that are constantly and lovingly putting others above themselves. And Paul's point in this adjoins with his next set of exhortations that are given for those not in the church but outside of the gathering of believers. The stranger, the foreigner, the enemy. To sum it up, Paul says live in harmony with one another. Blessing those who curse us...and going above and beyond to let them experience the love of Christ in their hatred of us. We want to scripture to say "Ignore the haters that throw shade at you" but Christ is most displayed when we show faith in active love.

Jesus is displayed when we live in harmony with the world.

Conclusion:

How are we to relate to people that come into our lives ... whether strangers, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, family and spouses... with self sacrifice, love and an eagerness to display Christ.

Paul goes on to finish chapter 12 and go into chapter 13 giving exhortations about how Christians should live with each other and those around them. You should take time this week reading through these exhortations and pray that God would give you your specific instructions to the images that Paul has given us. But at the end of chapter 13, Paul mentions that displaying Christ in our relationships is a time sensitive issue. An issue that should cause us to do even more ... with the reality that Christ is returning.

We love people differently when we know that time is running out. I was on a plane about a month ago and they had a movie playing called Everything, Everything. And the lead in the movie was teenage girl that had a auto-immune disease that kept her inside a neatly sanitized house... away from all of the world. And one day she fell in love with the boy next door... typical right... but

Entrusted to One Another

9

Romans 12: 9-21

as the story went on she had a growing desire to escape, even though she knew that she could die. Close to the end of the movie ... she did just that. And for the next few hours, she gave everything she could to her love interest. Because she didn't have the luxury of ignoring the delicacy of time. Our love should be more passionate, more authentic, more eager to serve... because we know that Christ is returning. And that reality should motivate us to display his love all the more while he's coming. Stewarding the people given to you by living a life that awaits the completion of salvation in love.