

MODULE 3: RELATIONSHIPS

SESSION 3: OUR VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION

Key Ideas for This Session:

- We were made to live in community. If we don't have healthy relationships, we won't grow and mature fully to be the people God made us to be.
- When spiritual principles ("the fruits of the spirit") are a foundation, relationships are protected from negative emotional reactions and outbursts.
- Our expectation of others should be guided by spiritual principles—including grace.
- Key verse: Ephesians 4:15:
Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.

We Are Each Uniquely Made and Have a Distinct Contribution in Community:

We were born to live in community. In Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, he describes the positive health effects of community as shown by a tight knit group of Italian immigrants in a New York suburb. This astoundingly healthy group of citizens (young and old) visit one another regularly, stop to chat on the street, cook for one another in their backyards. Many homes have three generations living under one roof by choice, and the elderly generations command great respect. They go to church together and it has a unifying and calming collective effect. There are 22 separate civic organizations in a town of just under two thousand people.

Research results of this group revealed that their physical health benefited more than anything else (including diet and fitness) from the positive community they had created for themselves.

Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

God Created Us as Social Beings

God Himself, as described in the Bible, has shown His desire to be in relationship with us. He communicates directly in the Old Testament with many individuals, including Adam, Abraham, and Moses. Through His son Jesus Christ, He dwelt among us, and through the Holy Spirit, He remains in us and we in Him.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are encouraged to “...consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Social life is interrupted where conflicts arise and where we are incapable of getting along. Much like seeds that are sown on shallow ground and do not take root, friendships are vulnerable to attack where foundational principles are not laid.

The Bible provides spiritual principles to live by that set correct values and protect from sin. These principles are the “fruits of the spirit” and consist of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). By committing to following these principles as we renew our minds in Christ, we protect these relationships and mutually benefit from them. Where the Spirit of God is, there is peace.

Read I Corinthians 12:12-26

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ 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!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

How does this describe our relationships with other people? What is the image that is used?

Do we all have the same role or place in life?

According to these verses, are good relationships with other people optional?

According to these verses, why does God give us other people to instruct us?

In verse 16, what do the “supporting ligaments” represent?

Verse 16 states that the body is “... *joined and held together by every supporting ligament and grows up and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*” Joints in a body are moving connections that join different parts of the skeleton together and enable the skeleton to function in a coordinated way. This is an example to illustrate healthy relationships with other people. It is through relationships with other people in the “body of Christ” that God supplies us with the support and nourishment we need to become fully mature. In your own body, if you do not use one arm over a long period of time, it will become weak and eventually the muscles will shrivel. In a similar way, if we refuse to nurture healthy relationships with one another according to God’s principles, we will become weak as a result.

Good, healthy relationships are not optional. When we follow God’s principles for our relationship with other people, we will grow in personal strength and maturity.

What Do Healthy Relationships Look Like?

Look up the word HONOUR in the dictionary. It can be used both as a noun or a verb. Write a definition for each type of use.

Honour as a noun (a thing):

Honour as a verb (an action):

Ephesians 6 in the Bible speaks about various human relationships.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² “Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What does verse 1 teach us?

What does verse 2 teach us?

This is the first commandment with a promise. What is that promise (verse 3)?

Read Revelation 14:6-7.

Then I saw another angel flying high overhead, with the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He spoke with a loud voice: Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

We are called to worship the Creator of the universe. He is the origin of all things including life itself. As our creator, God is greater than us, and greater than we can even imagine. God is also worthy of our worship because of who He is by His nature or character. God is perfect.

Human parents are not 100% good and upright people, yet they are still the mothers and fathers who bring their children into the world. Because they are our parents, and we are their children we owe them honour and respect. They

are our parents regardless of if they are good or bad, kind, or abusive, present or absent. The command to honour our parents is without exception.

Is it possible to honour a person who has mistreated or wronged you?

To honour (verb) your parents is based on a principle, not a feeling. It is not based on a parent's performance. Does it honour a person to forgive him or her?

Is it necessary to approve of all things your parents have done in order to honour them?

Does allowing abuse honour them?

Read Ephesians 6:4.
Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What do you think this means?

Often the big fault that we need to forgive our mother or father for, is a fault similar to our own. Remember that we need to hold ourselves to a high standard and understand the weaknesses of others. When God gives us a renewed spirit, we can begin taking steps to repair our relationships with

people who have wronged us, and we can also begin to see and “own” the wrong we have done to others. This is a process—don’t give up:

Hebrews 10:36

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

What do you think these promises of God are?

If you are a father or a mother, it is important to treat your children as they need to be treated with love and kindness, patience, support, guidance, protection, and even correction. If that was not your experience as a child, it can be difficult to change the pattern in relationship with your own children. Yet the scars and pain we carry from our own childhood are no reason or excuse to treat our own children in the same way. With God’s help, we can begin to treat our children and relate to them based on spiritual principles instead of on our feelings and emotional state.

For couples’ relationships, Ephesians 5:25-33 gives guidance:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of His body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

What can we learn about how the relationship between a couple should be?
What are the spiritual principles involved?

In what ways can a person “lay down his/her life” for their partner?

In relationship with your family, what one behaviour of yours would you change?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *Why is it important to have healthy relationships? How can you help to make it happen?*
- *What positive contribution might you wish to make within your community now? (Think about the fruits of the Spirit as you consider this question.)*
- *Memorize and pray through Galatians 6:9.*