



SUMMER DAZE • NEW HOPE CHURCH

God in the Everyday Relationships

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Props. I'll explain them in a few minutes, so we'll see. Anyway, whether you're here on campus or online, I'm glad we get to do this together, and I'm We announced this a while back that at some point fairly soon I'll be retiring. Don't know what I'm going to be when I grow up. There's a lot of factors in all that. But we've wanted to do this really well, and our team's doing a great job in just trying to think through what does healthy succession look like.

And we'll fill you in more later, but one of the questions has come up. We've been doing a lot of thinking. We've got an outside team that has been guiding us through this. And one of the questions came up last week was, how do you measure spiritual maturity or spiritual health? I mean, you can't put a thermometer in. I mean, how do you figure that out? Throughout time, churches have come up with different metrics. One of them is called nickels and noses.

Nickels, how much money's coming in? And noses, how many people show up? And that determines if you're a healthy church, but not really. How do you know if someone is spiritually healthy? How do you know if you're really doing well from God's perspective? And some will say, well, if someone regularly attends church, they're really doing well. Or they really know their Bible and have a whole lot of them. or they are generous in giving, and they regularly get a statement that says you're one of the top givers, or they're active in their small group or volunteering. All those things are really good. They're really, really good. And on the surface, they sound excellent. Like, well, that's a... Yeah, I can measure that. The thing is, is, you know, you can be a generous giver and still be a... I can't say that. Um... a not nice person.

You can show up. I've been around people that show up to every meeting in churches, and I'm not none of you, but they're really not very kind people. They're going through the motions, and you can do it. I mean, how many of y'all work in places where the way someone gets promoted to the next job is through seniority, not ability? or competency. So you can, some of these metrics are just not, I mean, what happens if you do these things, like you're always attending and you're always giving and you're always showing up for events in small group and all that, if that's all you're doing, on the surface, it can look great, but it could fuel self-righteousness. And then what we can start doing is I can start saying, well, I've come more than Murphy.

I mean, it's easy for us to come up with metrics that can be mistaken. I think there is at least one that shows more. And it's the kind of thing that shows our character, which shows all, am I really growing in my faith? Am I really closer to God than I've been? And how do I know? So we're going to focus on that today. And it

has to do with our relationships. Quite honestly, we could do, from what I've seen, we could do a message every other week on our relationships and still have a lot of work to do. We wouldn't have most of the New Testament if people that claim to follow Jesus got along really well.

There's so much of it dealing with problems and issues. And I hear people all the time saying, well, you know, it didn't used to be this way. It wasn't until, you know, you named the administration. It wasn't until they came in power that things really started going bad. I'm going to debunk that immediately. The first book in the Bible, Genesis, with the first family in the Bible, had some issues. Listen to this. This is from Genesis 4, talking about that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd and Cain cultivated the ground. So Abel is a rancher and Cain is a farmer. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought a gift, the best portions of the best portions of his firstborn lambs from his flock.

The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but did not accept Cain and his gift. And it's pretty clear why. One of them gave the best and the other gave leftovers. This made Cain very angry and he looked dejected. Why are you so angry, the Lord asked Cain? Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right, but if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out. Sin is crouching at the door eager to control you, but you must subdue it and be its master. Let me read that one again. If you refuse to do what is right, then watch out. Sin is crouching at the door eager to control you, but you must subdue it and be its master. Not long after this, Cain kills Abel.

He did not choose to subdue and master his anger and his jealousy. Instead, he let it simmer. It became bitterness and resentment. And the result was he got rid of what he thought was the problem, not realizing that it was him. Relationship problems do not get better over time. Have you heard the phrase, time heals all wounds? No. Some of you have had leaky pipes in your home and you just chose not to go in that room. Leaky pipes don't fix themselves. That sound that your motor is making in your car, it doesn't get better if you turn the radio up louder. That biopsy that revealed cancer, the cancer doesn't go away because you just choose to take vitamins and ignore it. Problems exist and then there are. It's an opportunity for us to address them. So I'm going to pray, and then we're going to do some homework thinking about the relationships we currently have and what God might be saying to us.

Let's pray. God, it is heart-wrenching to read about Cain and Abel, but it has been replayed over and over and over again, not just in the world around us, but in our own lives. Show us today what we can do, what you want us to do in the relationships that we have so that you would be proud of us, that we would resist sin that's crouching at the door. In Christ's name, amen. Relationships do not get... automatically better over time. They require intentional effort. And here's where I want to draw a distinction here. The things I'm going to mention today are not brand new, and they work for everybody. However, if I'm a follower of Jesus, this is mandatory.

It's a requirement. The standards that God lays out, the principles that he has, I need to grab hold of those. And if I want to know how I'm doing spiritually, if I'm really healthy and mature, it's going to be, have I embraced this? Am I living these out? If I'm not, I've got work to do. And it's true for every one of us that are

followers. It's not just the veterans, not just the ones that have been around a long time. So here's something Jesus taught us.

And why do you worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? Jesus loved humor. And he's drawing a huge picture here. In some translations, your friend's got a little splinter in their eye, and you've got this massive log in yours. How can you think of saying, friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite. First get rid of the log in your own eye, then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye. A hypocrite, you've heard the word plenty of times, it's just a poser or something, someone that's pretending. But let me say this, it is the number one reason when they interview people that are not followers of Jesus, the number one reason they say that holds them back from considering the Christian faith is what they see as hypocrisy among people that claim to follow him.

People that outwardly act a certain way, but inwardly are not that way. People that are one way publicly, but then when you get around them other times, they're two-faced. They're posing as something that they're not. They're acting like God is so fortunate to have them on the team, and they want to let everybody else know that they're falling short. So my understanding of this, the more I read it, is that we need to practice looking in the mirror before we spend time looking out the window, which is why I brought my fine props. The thing about the mirror or the window is they're really fun to look out of.

I can stare at other people, I can critique them, I can see all of their faults. And I kind of enjoy it. It's what, actually that's probably our number one pastime in the United States is catching other people messing up. You see it on Instagram, you see it on the news, you see it everywhere you go. People screwing up and others can't wait to catch them. That's wonderful. I'll give you an illustration. What if you're at a dinner party? And you're sitting there with all these people and you notice that someone's got a little piece of gack on their chin. Don't you enjoy that? It's like, especially if it's someone that's kind of prim and proper and they're kind of all there together and then you see they got a little eggplant right there. And you're thinking, man. And you get up and go to the bathroom and find out you had some eggplant here plus a little gack in your teeth.

That's kind of what Jesus is getting at. We don't like looking in the mirror, and we really don't like the part that magnifies. Have you got one of these? Like this one's got, oh, I think the light works. Well, maybe the battery's not in. I'll borrow this. They're horrible because you think I'm doing okay, and then you get in and you look at that thing, and there's stuff there that you never knew existed, and you don't even know what half of it is.

It's like, wow, I don't want to see that. I'd rather go look out the window and see other people's. I don't want to look at mine. This is really not much fun. In fact, they make certain kind of lighting, I think, on some of these where it darkens over time. So you're really not seeing, I mean, you think you're seeing it, but you're really not because it's kind of gauzed it out. Let me give you some real examples, though. Have you ever caught yourself, you're driving down the road, and you see a car, and you're pretty sure, and then you pull up beside them, and you find out the driver's texting. And you're like, oh, people that text and drive. I can't

believe someone would do it. Well, a little while later, you're texting and driving, and here's what the thing is. In your mind, you're thinking, yeah, but I text really short, and I'm able to look both ways.

I'm sure they can't. You notice how we give each other... We give others less grace than we give ourselves. How about watching someone, it could be TV, it could be the news, it could be a show somewhere, someone that you perceive as very narrow-minded, they've come up with a judgment about certain groups or certain individuals, and they're just laying into them, and in your mind you're thinking, well, they're talking about people they don't even know. They don't even know that person, and then you start going into how the person doing that is such an idiot or a Neanderthal or whatever it is, and you're doing the exact same thing because you don't know them. See, we really enjoy looking out the window. I can catch all kind of people doing all kind of things. I don't like this.

But what Jesus is saying is, I need to be willing to look in the mirror first. I need to look at my own life. I need to look at my own motivations, what drives me. Because it's only when I've done that that I'm going to be able to look at others the way God intends me to. We have got a lot of work to do. And no one can do it for us. There are tons of examples about all this. Jesus takes it very seriously. But I want to go back to what we read in Genesis. God tells Cain, if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out. Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.

I want to go through a handful of things that I think are really, really important for all of us. The summer makes things harder because you've got travel, you've got people that come stay with you, you're exposed to a lot more people at the pool, you get to see your neighbors more. There's just a lot going on and our relationships, they're really in the spotlight. And again, these things I'm going to mention, they would help anybody, but those of us that claim to follow Jesus, this is absolutely standard operating procedure for you and me. And there's no out clause, there's no, well, I'm taking a break. Hebrews 12, 14. Work at living in peace with everyone you like.

That's what we add, isn't it? Work at living in peace with everyone and work at living a holy life. For those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. My responsibility, if I follow Jesus, is I'm to be working my level best To be at peace with everyone in my sphere of influence. Even those that don't like me and I don't like them. There's something about this I've got to work at. And it goes on to say, work at living a holy life. The word holy doesn't mean you glow in the dark. It doesn't mean that you're at the church all the time. You've memorized all. Holy means my life has been set.

I have become a follower of Jesus and I've now set myself apart for him. Nothing is going to get in the way of me doing my level best to honor and please the one that gave everything for me. And we don't live a holy life so that we get extra credit. I live a holy life. I'm working at that out of just sheer gratitude that God didn't just write me off. He sees everything, and yet he's willing to forgive me over and over again when I ask for it.

This idea of being holy just means that I'm his, and no matter what situation I'm in, no matter what I'm doing, I've got to remember, that's right, I belong to him. I need to honor him in this situation. What Cain did was chose to focus on himself. He allowed that sin that was crouching at the door to take over him, and it says

here, watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness... comes in you, that's exactly what we see in Cain. And it infected all of his thinking and his perspective to the point where he could say, I really think it'd be okay if I kill my brother. In our atrium here, you see these seven banners, and one of them says, do reconcile. Those of us that are partners at New Hope have agreed, I'm going to work hard at doing that. In reconciling, it takes two parties to reconcile, but only one to initiate it.

And I'm saying, I'm going to own the relationships I'm in. I'm going to do everything I can to try to make things right. I'm going to do everything I can to work at living in peace. If it was easy, we wouldn't have these commands. It's not easy. It's not simple. It's not do these three steps and everything's fine. But it's a process. I'm going to do my best to live in peace with everyone around me. Here's another verse that very few of us want to memorize. Sensible people control their temper. They earn respect by overlooking wrongs. Some of us seem to believe that we get extra respect by pointing out other people's wrongs. Especially in certain circles that we run in, we get extra credit for being able to point out where other people have screwed up. You can build a whole career on this, by the way.

Something about this means I need to control my temper, my words, even my expressions. I'll give you a bonus. This is Ephesians 4.26. This is a tremendous short passage. It says, in your anger, do not sin. So it's not saying that getting angry is wrong. It's just saying making decisions based on anger is. So in your anger, do not sin. And it says, don't let the sun go down while you are still angry. In other words, you're angry, you're struggling, you're frustrated about something. Deal with it now. Don't let it linger. Don't bury it. Don't hide it. Don't ignore it because you'll be like Cain and it's going to come back up and erupt.

This whole thing of overlooking wrongs, I'll mention about this, because the longer you're with people, the more you know them, the more stuff you get on them. Becky and I have been married a long time. I know a lot of things about her, and she knows a lot of things about me. If we don't keep a short account of things, it's real easy to come back and say, well, remember that time you did this? Remember that? And some of you have lived with this your whole life, where the people are constantly bringing up the past to you, because it never was reconciled. It wasn't dealt with.

This idea of overlooking wrongs, what it means is that I'm willing to let some things go, and I'm only going to pursue the top priorities, the ones that are patterns, the ones that could be endangering somebody or the people around them. The idea of highlighting other people's imperfections can become a hobby, it can become a habit, and it feeds our own self-righteousness. The mirror reminds me of my faults. The mirror reminds me of that stuff in me that I have control over. If I'm not careful, if I forget that and I just look out the window, I'm just gonna look at everybody else's faults. And there are plenty of them because they're wired and made just like me. I'm not responsible for your faults, I'm responsible for mine.

And this idea of overlooking, that means if something is a one-off, it's not a major deal, let it go. If it's a pattern, if it's something very serious, if it's something significant, then find a way to address it and address it in a good way, in a humble, honest, genuine kind of way. Ephesians 4.15 says this, Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church.

I need to learn how to, if I need to address, you know, I pray about it, and this is an issue, and I think my friend needs to hear this. I need to humbly come to them, and I need to speak the truth, but I need to speak it lovingly. I don't come at them blasting them and saying, you're such a fool. You're such an idiot. You've done it again. And by the way, the reason we don't do it that way is because that's not how God treats us.

I can go to somebody and say, you know, I've noticed something, something seems to be off, or I've seen this pattern, you seem to be angry, whatever it is, but in a humble way, bring it up and you do it privately, not publicly. The great benefit of being vitally connected into a church is that we get to learn some of these relational things together. Some of us didn't grow up in homes where they were handled well. And so in our new family, we get to practice it. We get to support. We get to encourage each other. I think being part of a church vitally connected, it ought to be a place where you get so much encouragement and, at times, some challenge, some pushback, some correction, especially if there's a pattern there. And this idea of speaking the truth in love, it means that I'm going to say what's true, but I'm going to temper it with grace and kindness, still the truth, but not using it as a club to beat somebody.

Some of us love the truth, we like to beat people up with it, and others of us have had that and we say, oh no, I'm just gonna be a kind, gentle, loving person, and no truth. And all you're doing is subsidizing somebody else's problems. We need to hold both of those together. And I want to tell you, a person that has done that so much in my life since I've been here is Kim Feld. Kim and I have been teammates here at New Hope for a long time, and she is... She has proven that she's a good friend because there are times, there's another passage in Proverbs, it's faithful are the wounds of a friend. In other words, a friend will tell you the truth even if it's not comfortable. And Kim has done that. She has seen areas in my life and she'll point it out, we'll sit down and she goes, there's something here I think you need to see or there's a concern I have.

I don't hear about her saying that to other people. I hear her coming to me and saying it to me because she cares that much about it. There's an honesty about it. There's an investigation about it. It's looking into it. She doesn't jump to a conclusion, but she doesn't ignore it either. Real friends will do that. People that are very mature spiritually are willing to do that, and those that receive it, if they're spiritually mature, are going to say, tell me a little bit more.

You don't have to like it. And I'm going to tell you this whole thing of pointing out others' faults. It is so easy to do, and it's actually really fun. I can look through the window. The other day, well, it's been a little while. When you're my age, the other day could have been 30 years ago. But there was some smoke coming into our yard. really thick black smoke. I thought, what is going on? Well, our neighbor decided they didn't want to pay the fee to go to the landfill, so they decided to burn their couch. And the way couches burn, I don't know what they're made out of, but it's pretty nasty smoke. I could have gotten on next door and gone to town on my neighbor.

Ends up, I've got, our neighbor's really nice. They just did something I would have preferred they hadn't done, but I don't have to call the police on them. Some of you live in neighborhoods where the police are getting called all the time because there's something that just bothers you. This morning, so this is, my daughter Sarah brought this to me. We were supposed to hand it off yesterday and it didn't happen.

Something came up. And so this morning, It was 10 till 9, and I still didn't have it. Now, as a parent, this is another weird thing about parents, is your kids are always little kids to you. And you say things that, nah, you probably just shouldn't say it. So I was texting Sarah, 10 till 9, and I was starting to text her. I've already told her this, so it's all good.

I said, um, I was going to say, I hope you didn't forget the mirror. Well, what's wrong with that? Oh, it's very demeaning. There's a better way for me to have approached that. It's more humble and real. And that is what I ended up doing. I didn't send that, although now it's all out in the open. What I did send her, I said, when you bring it this morning, put it in the green room. Do you see a difference? I wasn't assuming the worst. I wasn't trying to correct her in a backhanded way. I was trying to show respect to her, but I did need the mirror. This whole relational thing, if we're not careful, we operate on autopilot. We do stuff over and over again, and it offends people, but we never address it. We don't deal with it. We have got to.

We're to live in peace. We're to do everything we can to live in peace with others in a God-honoring way because there are people watching us all the time and they want to see something. Is this Christian thing really good? Can people really change? Or is it just hypocrisy, posing, pretending? I don't know the situation you're in. I know that all of us, if we're surrounded in all kind of ways, whether it's our neighborhood, our homes, our family that's extended, classmates, work, all kind of places we are. What would honoring God look like today for you in some of the relationships you know that aren't quite good? They're not quite right. Is there something you need to do to pursue reconciling Is there something you need to do to ask, say, have I done anything to offend you? It doesn't feel like things are right between us, and open the door and try to discuss it.

You and I are to be the agents of finding healing. No guarantee it's going to work out. There's a guarantee if you don't do anything that it won't, though. God, and I will say this, and I believe this is absolutely true, that there are relationships that some of us are in right now or are going to be soon where God has allowed it to happen because he's trying to help us become spiritually mature and healthy. And he wants to reveal something in us we need to work on. He wants to refine character we already have. And he wants to show others around us something that is good and genuine and that they get it if I can forgive somebody they might get this idea maybe God could forgive me too a lot of us avoid the mirror we'd rather look out the window but what God has said look at yourself first look at yourself in the light of the truth of my word Get yourself right, and then you're going to be able to look out the window.

You're going to be able to see others. You're going to see them in the way I do. Ephesians 4 says this. It says, get rid of, and listen to this, get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. This is a mandate. This is not optional. And when we take this on and we begin to live it out, we're going to see God working in our lives. We're going to see a sense of confidence that I really do have a relationship. I'm going to see him open doors. I'm going to see him give me patience that I didn't think I had. I'm going to see him give me grace that I have received but haven't offered others.

We got work to do. And in our spheres of influence, people need to see this. Let's go after it. There's a take-home sheet, and I hope you'll spend some time today, over lunch today, do it as a family, do it with some friends, do it in your small group. Let's see what we can do. We've got this phenomenal opportunity to show people something good. Let's pray. God, you know us so well. And we love looking out the window at others and catching them, but we struggle with looking in the mirror and seeing what we really are and seeing what we really are the way you see us. But it's only then that we can recognize grace and forgiveness and mercy. I ask that you would help each of us today to take a good look in the mirror. to allow you to speak to us that we would recognize that there is an enemy, there is sin crouching at the door, and when we decide to walk away from what you say to go another way, that we are putting ourselves in harm's way. Please speak to us and unsettle us until we decide that we're going to settle things with you. In Christ's name, amen.