



HEART: Relationships



"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun, like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way [they are], right here and now."

- Fred Rogers

Definition: Relational wellness is the ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.

Verse: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* - Ephesians 4:32

Introduction

Relationships require time, energy, and skills to nurture and grow. Too often, it can seem like relationships simply *happen* on their own. The reality is that every relationship is co-created by two people over time. Both contribute to the way the relationship works, and both have the power to influence its direction. We are active participants in *all* of the relationships we are in.

1. Clothe Yourself with Compassion

Colossians 3:12-17: *¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Just as choose what to wear each morning, we can choose to "clothe ourselves" in compassion, kindness and humility before entering an interaction.

- Which of these virtues - humility, gentleness, or patience - is the hardest for you to "put on" when dealing with a difficult person?
- What relationship "clothes" do we wear when we encounter the world? In what ways do we "put on armor" when reading social media or the news, and how might that affect us?
- What might it look like to "clothe ourselves with love" when we interact with those who have hurt us, or whom we have hurt?

2. Slow to Anger

James 1:19-20: *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*

In our culture, being "quick to speak" is often seen as a sign of intelligence or confidence. James flips this upside down by prioritizing listening over speaking. The "righteousness God desires" is creating and sustaining a relationship that reflects His character. Anger usually seeks to protect the *self*, while listening seeks to protect the *relationship*.

- When you are in a heated conversation, are you truly listening to understand, or just waiting for your turn to "win" the argument?
- Reflect on a time when you successfully navigated a challenging situation in a relationship by listening or acting with gentleness and respect instead of pursuing your case. What did you learn from this experience?

3. Speak Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15,25: *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... Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Most people lean toward one side of this verse: they either speak "Truth" (blunt, harsh, hurtful) or "Love" (avoiding conflict, enabling, being a doormat). The "I" statement is a practical tool for the middle ground. It is **Truthful** about your experience, but **Loving** in its delivery because it doesn't attack the other person's character.

Read Handout #1 ("I" Statements) and walk through the example scenarios. For each scenario, ask how might the person in that scenario feel? How did the example "I" statement help them *speak the truth in love*? How might the other person respond to an "I" statement versus a "you" statement?

Weekly Challenge

- **Self-Reflection:** Reflecting on the Fred Rogers quote at the beginning and how he modeled positive relationship building to viewers, ask yourself: *How am I modeling positive relationships in my own life? Where are there opportunities to do better?*
- **Identify your "Relational Clothes":** Before a difficult meeting or family gathering, consciously choose one virtue (patience, kindness, or humility) to "put on" and try.
- **The 5-Second Pause (The Mental Stopwatch):** Apply the "slow to speak" rule during a disagreement. Count to five before responding.
- **Practice the "I":** Use one "I" statement in a difficult conversation.