

Engaging in Meaningful Relationships

Message 2 of 3 in the series: "Paramount"

1. Relationships are essential for Christianity.

- a. Jesus taught that relationships are God's priority.

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?' Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40 (NLT)

- b. Our relationships are the proof that we are Jesus' disciples.

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

John 13:34-35 (NLT)

"If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead." 1 John 3:14 (NLT)

- c. Loving others is how we love God.

"And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. If someone claims, 'I know God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him."

1 John 2:3-5 (NLT)

"Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning." 2 John 1:6 (NLT)

- d. God uses our relationships to transform us to be more like Jesus.

"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble." Proverbs 13:20 (NLT)

"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." 2 Timothy 2:22 (NLT)

"In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NLT)

2. Relationships become meaningful when they are Christ-centered, allowing us to treat people as God treats us.

"meaningful" = having a serious, important, or useful quality or purpose

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 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." Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT)

- a. Meaningful relationships demonstrate unconditional love.

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12 (NIV)

"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them." Romans 12:9a (NLT)

Note: Love is a choice- not a feeling.

- b. Meaningful relationships are built upon unreserved acceptance.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Romans 15:7 (NIV)

“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”

Luke 5:30-32 (NIV)

Note: Acceptance is not based upon agreement or approval of behavior. It is based upon the value of the person.

- c. Meaningful relationships require complete forgiveness.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

“Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’” Matthew 18:32-33 (NLT)

Note: To forgive is to release the offense. We can forgive without the other person asking for it.

Life Application: Respond to God. Do not react to people. “Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.” Ephesians 5:17 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Read Matthew 22:36-40. How do these two commands encapsulate every other commandment? How might you explain the relationship between these two commands?
2. Looking back at your life, what relationships has God brought into your life at crucial times?
 - How did God use those relationships in your life?
 - Has there ever been a time God brought someone into your life that could have helped you, but you resisted the relationship?
 - When was a time God brought you into someone’s life to help them?
3. Discuss the following statements: “Your life is a composite of the five people closest to you.” – Jim Rohn
“Your relationships determine the direction and quality of your life.” – Andy Stanley
4. What does unconditional love mean to you? What difference does being loved unconditionally by Jesus make in your daily life? What does the story of the Good Samaritan teach us about unconditional love (Luke 10:25-37)?
5. How does Jesus accept you? Why is it difficult for people to distinguish between acceptance and approval / agreement? What does the story of Matthew’s party reveal about acceptance (Matthew 9:10-13)?
6. How does Jesus forgive you? What difference does it make in your life to know that Jesus forgives you completely? What do we learn about forgiveness from the story of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)?
7. Discuss the life application “Respond to God. Do not react to people.” What are some specific situations in which you can apply this principle? (Hints- at work, at home, with strangers, etc.)