

Hope for Our Relationships in Distress

(Part 3 of 4 on Mental Awareness)

An Interview with Rob Mason and Anne Kemps

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Rob Mason and Anne Kemps are professional therapists. (Rob is a former pastor). They were interviewed by Pastor Mark Wallace. The following are excerpts from their comments:

Relationships are not confined to individuals; the community as a whole also requires good relationships among its constituents.

People were confined or contained within boundaries during the Covid-19 shutdown. Huge changes such as these can be greatly disturbing to us. We prefer tranquility and stability. When these are disturbed, anxiety takes hold of us. We only have to think of the closure of the Harbour Bridge and the added effect on us even for a short while.

A church is an *ecclesia*; the Greek word literally means “called-out ones”. It refers to an assembly of Christians under a leader/speaker. To be a church is to gather together. Without meeting as an assembly in some form, we cannot represent God fully; meeting in person with one another was really missed.

Individuals can worry if they think they have fallen out of love with someone, or should they think their friends are no longer genuine. Church fellowship gives a sense of belonging – being rooted and grounded in something that is solid, God and His people. We become greatly disturbed when that fellowship is broken, when our equanimity with life is disconnected. Whenever we lose our sense of belonging, our being moves into a state of anxiety.

Insecurity is a feeling we have within ourselves should we become aware that we do not belong to the group. We may solve that insecurity by leaving the group and never returning. Society expects us to be autonomous individuals, but losing friends can become disastrous for many. Yet a **Christian** is never alone – even when we think we have been abandoned, God is with us. Nonetheless, all Christians must reach out to others; we are supposed to offer hope and love in Christ to each other.

Two well-known clichés are frequently used under trying conditions: “I must push through this” and “Just get over it.” Sometimes, people cannot just get over something that really hurts. A hurting person’s needs are real.

All Christians know, or ought to know, that all their sins are washed away (1 John 1:7). Why then do we still suffer pain from a past (sinful) action? Read the Psalms. Many of them express, in detail, great emotional hurt that is directly communicated to God, something that we should emulate ourselves. Yet, everyone wants to know that others are there for them as well. As individuals, we need to be special to somebody in times of trials.

Strangely, yet true, we often fight each other even when we are collectively fighting for the same cause. **Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)** is helpful in resolving such issues. It is

based on the understanding that fundamentally we are all the same, that we all have **conflict** issues from time to time. The problem isn't you and it isn't me – It's the combination; both are at fault. All things, both sides, must be worked out. We are all part of an integrated whole: marriages, friendships, church, society.

There are cycles of pursuit and withdrawal in relationships.

The Pursuer protests to be heard or reached for connection. They tend to be emotional and intense. If the other party withdraws, they feel rejected.

The Withdrawers are those who move away from the problem because they wish to avoid the conflict. They cannot make sense of the many emotions that flood them. They would prefer to maintain the status quo – the quiet – rather than seek a solution.

The pain and hurt felt by both pursuers and withdrawers are real and not to be minimised. The negative cycle impacts the happiness level and quality of the relationship. This is true in marriages, friendships, and in the church itself. We are flawed human beings and “called-out ones” who can help mend brokenness. We should consider how we may do a better job of this assignment from our Maker.

Discussion Questions

1. Can a person have a good relationship environment within a family or even within a church, yet be at odds and feel lonely within society at large? Or the opposite: have a healthy relationship with the outside world, yet live in a toxic environment at home? How long can one live in either environment?
2. Where do short-term relationships (such as road rage, untidy neighbours, plastic pollution, refereeing mistakes) fit in with the discussion of conflict resolution?
3. What does this saying mean to you: “Without meeting as an assembly in some form, we cannot represent God fully”?
4. Have you ever experienced insecurity when you realized you were no longer a member (friend) of a group? What did you do about it?
5. Do you tend to be a **pursuer** or a **withdrawer** in a conflict with someone with whom you are in a close relationship (friendship, marriage, family)? Describe.

6. Are these sayings helpful in a crisis: “I must push through this” and, “Just get over it”?
7. **Read Psalm 109:1-20.** Notice the demands David places on the Lord to avenge his adversaries. Have you ever prayed in that manner to God? With Jesus’ commands to us to love and forgive our enemies, how would you pray if you were similarly affronted by your enemy’s actions? Which would make you feel better?

Prayer Suggestions for Life Groups

For our nation post-election.

Child Rescue has made several prayer requests including the following:

- Please pray for JD and Beatrix as they prepare to return to New Zealand.
- Please pray for God's financial provision for Child Rescue to provide for more rescues, raids and care for more children at this crucial time. Our funds are suffering in this Covid-19 environment. We are also praying for more speaking and event opportunities to share the message of Child Rescue now that restrictive levels have lifted.
- Jyoti (Nepal based) has been hospitalized with Covid-19. She was having difficulty breathing. Hospitals are overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients and it was a miracle there was an open bed for Jyoti (Praise God!) in one of the hospitals! Pray her faith would sustain her during this trying time and she would know she is in the Lord's everlasting arms. Pray for healing and proper treatment.
- Please remember our newly appointed HR Specialist volunteering from Oz - she fell on Saturday & broke her collarbone. She has 4 foster children in her sole care & the 7-year-old male triplets need to be rehomed while she heals. Please pray not only for her healing but that the boys can be placed together in a loving home minus the fear etc that comes with upheaval on an already trauma filled life.