




Theme: Relationships.


Romantic Relationships

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹³ Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. – Colossians 3:13


Monday, April 22 – Read **Matthew 7:9-14**. In this passage, Jesus summed up the big ideas he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, including God's wisdom about human relationships. He had told his hearers to love their enemies, be honest, show mercy, and more. Those were not separate, individual rules. They expressed the great principle in verse 12 (often called the "Golden Rule") of treating others as God treats us, and as we would like others to treat us.


 In law, business, politics (and too often in committed personal relationships), we often hear the idea that we ought to treat people based on what they deserve. Jesus said to treat people as God treats us, with grace and generosity even when we don't deserve that. The word "mutual" is crucial here. Harming our mates, physically or emotionally, or controlling and demeaning them, is the definition of contempt and is the exact opposite of helping our partner. We find this profound idea also in Romans 5:6-8 and 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. How can marriage and other relationships become more enduring when love and grace replace "deserving" to guide us in mutual love and sharing?

 We might think that the "Golden Rule" was just a nice, surface-y social motto, one of those things that sounds good, but nobody can live up to. This is most likely why Jesus added in verse 14, "The gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it." What people or conditions make it hardest for you to treat others as you'd like them to treat you? What are some ways you have proactively tried to treat others in "Golden Rule" fashion? How easy or hard was it to do that?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to live less and less in "demand" mode, and more and more in line with your teaching. Help me to treat others in the ways I wish they'd treat me. Amen.*


Tuesday, April 23 – Read **Ephesians 4:29-5:4**. This passage listed key qualities that destroy relationships, and others that heal them. Treating one another in un-Christlike ways, such as with bitterness, losing our temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil, damages and often destroys relationships. Letting Christ change your life from the inside out opens you to growing qualities like compassion, kindness, and a forgiving heart. God works through these qualities to strengthen (and heal when needed) our relationships.


 The earliest Hebrew stories about what went wrong in our world in Genesis 3:8-19, said that as soon as humans failed to follow God's ways, they denied responsibility and blamed their partner (and others). Ephesians urged its readers to let God grow them into better partners before looking at others. Choose one area from today's reading to grow in (such as putting aside anger, being more loving, forgiving, gentle, or pure). Commit to daily ask God to guide your growth in that area.

 Today's reading didn't say, "Behave nicely to others—no matter how much you despise them inside." It did say, "Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy." The Holy Spirit is unhappy when we speak destructive and hurtful words about others, and when people divide against one another by putting each other down. God offered to change us inwardly, in ways our outer behavior then reflects. How can you let the Holy Spirit shape you into a person who can more fully be "kind, compassionate, and forgiving"?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me not to hide from or rationalize anger or bitterness you make me aware of inside myself. Do your transforming work in me, shaping me into a good relationship partner. Amen.*


Wednesday, April 24 – Read **Philippians 4:4-9**. The apostle Paul talks about gladness, gentleness, an absence of anxiety, a spirit of gratitude and a deep, abiding peace in these verses. These things don't happen naturally, without any intentionality on our part. Paul ended by saying, "practice these things." We become strong followers of Jesus by choosing to direct our thoughts and our actions toward our God, who promised us rich spiritual and relational rewards.


 In verse 5 we read, "Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people." Various marriage counselors and pastors have noted the sad irony that many people treat strangers or casual acquaintances far more gently than they do their spouse or children. How's your gentleness quotient toward "all people"? How is it toward the people to whom you are closest?

 Verse 6 said, "Don't be anxious about anything; rather bring up all your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks." Do you pray regularly about your closest relationships? Are you at ease talking with God about whatever is on your mind in that area of life, whether happy or difficult? Do you give thanks for people you love and those who love you?

Prayer: *God, you created me to be in relationships. Fill me with the qualities that will make me a blessing to everyone, and especially to those I love the most. Amen.*


Thursday, April 25 – Read **Corinthians 7:1-9 and 13:4-7**. In the apostle Paul's day, Corinth was a very rich, very immoral city. Scholar William Barclay wrote these words about Corinth in his commentary on Paul's letters. "The very word *Korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery." Paul told believers there that limiting intimacy to committed relationships was crucial, though Greek and Roman culture seldom did that. He also clearly said sexual intimacy was a good thing to express and bond marital love, trust, and commitment.


 Successful Christian marriages are about choosing to do the loving thing. They involve two people sharing one clear mission with their vows as a personal mission statement. Wedding vows often capture the intention of Agape Love that is selfless and sacrificial. We must continually and deliberately live out that mission statement after it is said to another person. Why would that clarity of mission be especially vital in a city like Corinth? What do you see in Paul's definition of *agape* that you particularly need to be deliberate to live out?

 In Corinth, "sacred" prostitutes, from 100 to 1000, came down from the Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of "love," to work the streets each night. There are obvious differences, but what are some ways that city's culture and attitudes resemble today's? How did this setting give special force to Paul's words about each person in a sexual relationship actively caring for their partner's needs and well-being, not merely pursuing their own gratification?

Prayer: *Lord God, you lived out agape, and I say I want to follow you. Unfold the path to living in selfless love before me and fill me with your Spirit to empower me to follow that path. Amen.*


Friday, April 26 – Read **Galatians 5:22-26**. To the churches in Galatia, the apostle Paul listed key qualities God offers to grow in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Who wouldn't want those qualities in a spouse, a date, a friend, or a co-worker? Paul gave the Holy Spirit center stage. As scholar N. T. Wright put it in commentary, *Paul for Everyone*, "The nine qualities Paul lists in verses 22–23 are not things which, if we try hard enough, we could simply do without help, without the spirit."

 Paul clearly believed that God's people could depend on the Holy Spirit's guidance. But the Spirit seldom confronts us with flashing billboards. If that happens, we'd better definitely pay attention! God's guidance usually reaches us in quiet, subtle ways. What steps can you, and your partner in any close relationship, take to keep your spiritual "ears" open to the Spirit's direction? (For a readable list of helpful spiritual practices, go to, <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines>.)

 Reflect prayerfully on the qualities the apostle called "the fruit of the Spirit" in verses 22-23. Which of them most appeals to you, and seem to come most naturally? Which of them do you find that you struggle with the most? How do you believe the qualities with which you struggle would deepen and enrich your closest relationships? Do you trust that the Spirit can and will help those qualities grow in you over time, if not instantly?

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, plant your fruit in my heart, and teach me how to be good soil in which that fruit can flourish. Let me be a person who gifts others with love, joy, and peace. Amen.*

Saturday, April 27 – Read **Matthew 7:24-27**. Picture yourself standing on a beach standing on the water's edge. What happens to the sand under your feet as the water flows in and out? It literally moves out from under your feet and can cause you to lose your balance. Now, imagine a house that is built on sand. What is going to happen when the rain falls, the floods come, and the wind blows? The sand is going to wash away, and the house will collapse. This wasn't hypothetical: in Palestine, William Barklay notes in his commentary on Matthew that, "there was many a gully which in summer was a pleasant sandy hollow but was in winter a raging torrent of rushing water." This is the image Jesus used to conclude the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This isn't just any sermon, either. It's Jesus' main body of teaching. Anyone, "who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice," is like someone who builds a house on sand. The final impression that Jesus' left his listeners with was a warning that it's not just about hearing Jesus' words. It's about doing them.

 Be humble. Tell the truth. Don't judge others. These are but a few of the many lessons throughout the Sermon on the Mount. The foundation of all these lessons is love. No relationship is immune from the storms of life, and love is a foundation built on solid rock that keeps the house (the relationship) from crashing down. Thinking about your relationships, what storms have you endured? How sturdy was your foundation? In what ways can you practice love to ensure that your "house is firmly set on bedrock"? What are 2-3 ways you can practice love in your relationship(s) today?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you that your love for me is always a "house firmly set on bedrock." Help me to follow your example today and practice love in my relationships. Amen.*