Relation*slip*s

For the next few weeks, I am sharing a series of messages designed to help us prevent and overcome the slips and breakdowns in our relationships. And let me just say upfront that today’s message may be challenging, but I am excited about it because I think this could be pivotal in some of the most important relationships we have. What you decide today could be the decision that changes the course of one of those significant relationships. So, I hope we are all up for the challenge.

Let’s pray.

When I think of my most embarrassing moments and my biggest regrets, more often than not, they have something to do with my *relationslips*. You know what I’m talking about, right? A *relationslip* is when you say or do something you shouldn’t have that hurts someone and hurts the relationship.

Or, maybe your *relationislip* was NOT to say or do something that NEEDED to be said and done. But, either way, the end result is a damaged or broken relationship.

I don’t know if there is anything more painful or emotionally consuming than a broken relationship. Isn’t that right? When your relationships are out of whack, they weigh you down like a backpack full of bricks. Your mind is constantly distracted as you obsess about how to fix what you broke. You even get sick thinking of it, trying to find solutions.

I know this because it has happened to me. I have made *relationslips* with my wife, with my kids, with my friends, colleagues, and church. This is true for all of us. I know that because we are all human, and that’s what we do. And, because of that, we experience all kinds of problems.

Some of us have lost a job because of our *relationslips*. Some of us have lost a marriage. We have lost friends and made enemies. We have been excluded, lost business, and missed opportunities. And, as a result, some of us have just plain given up on relationships because we can’t seem to figure out how to prevent or overcome our *relationslips*.

Thankfully, there is someone that can help us with our relationships, and that’s Jesus. Jesus interacted with difficult people every day, and he did it with wisdom and grace. He knew when to confront people, and he knew when to walk away. And, so, Jesus is going to teach us about relationships over the next three weeks.

Today I want to share with you the first two principles about relationships. If you are going to prevent and overcome *relationslips*, **we need to make relationships a priority by representing God the best way we can in our relationships.**

None of this has to do with learning how to be nice. We want to go deeper than just nice. I want us to get to the heart of what makes for good relationships, and I believe Jesus is the only one that can get us there.

I don’t know if you have ever thought about this, but probably **90% of what it means to follow Jesus has to do with how you treat other people.** God cares about how we treat people. It matters to him because how we treat people shows how much we care about God.

A lot of Christians don’t understand that. They think they can bury themselves in their Bible or hide out in church and God will be impressed. But God isn’t looking for how religious we can be. God is looking for how well we can love people. This is one of the most significant ways through which we worship and glorify God: by the way we care for each other.

Nevertheless, let’s be honest, when most of us think about worshiping God, we immediately think of doing something religious, like going to church, reading the Bible, or praying. Our default for spirituality is to DO something religious—which is not wrong, but it is not the end of a healthy spiritual life.

For example, Jesus was less concerned about going to the temple and much more concerned about how they treated other people. He said this,

This is my command: Love each other. John 15:17

And,

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

To love like Jesus loves is a bit overwhelming. But it gets harder. Jesus even said,

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:43-45

I think some people may now be WISHING Jesus just told us to go to church or read our Bible. That would be a lot easier than loving and praying for our enemies. You see, going to church, praying, and reading the Bible is the easy part; **relating in a godlike manner to others is the hard practice**—even to those who treated us as their enemies.

In essence, Jesus says that our ability to love others reveals if we grasp what it means to be his disciples and that loving our neighbor is one of the litmus tests for our faith.

Unfortunately, many people fail this test: we are great at going to church but terrible at loving and caring for others. That is why Christians are often called hypocrites. They are meant to be different, love different, treat people differently, yet sometimes we can hardly see any difference between those who love God and those that curse God. They use language, behave, and have attitudes that hurt others rather than bless them. Unintentionally, perhaps, but it does not make it any less wrong.

The apostle John put it like this:

We know that we have died to our old life and received God’s new life…because we love one another. Those who do not love are still living in their old life. 1 John 3:14

This teaches us that we need to grow in how we treat other people because that reflects our spirituality and love better than anything else. We can’t be treating people in the way we did in our old life. Our language, behaviors, and attitudes should be renewed as much as our soul has been saved.

The apostle John even has some harsh words to those of us who are careless about how we treat people,

Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God who they have not seen. The commandment we have from Jesus is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. 1 John 4:20-21

I know what you may be thinking: I don’t like this, it is very uncomfortable, it is hard. I mean, there may be people in our lives that are very difficult and hard to love. If you are thinking like this, I get it; I know a few of those too!

However, when God loved us, did we deserve to be loved? Perhaps, it would be helpful to be reminded that Jesus loved us while he was on the cross. He said while hanging nailed to the cross: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.”

Being on the cross was not a great feeling. Sometimes love does not feel like a warm, nice feeling, but it is about choosing to no harm others. Jesus could have destroyed his enemies, yet he prayed for them, asking for their forgiveness.

Crazy, right? God loves even the enemies of his Son. All this means that it is not up to us to decide how we love and whom we love but to learn to live in the love Jesus Christ taught us. Sometimes is going to feel great; other times is about choosing to do no harm.

Consider this. Our enemies should not be our enemies because we make them so, they may be against us, but we do not contribute to that broken relationship. So, just because someone behaves harmfully against you as an enemy does not mean that you need to become their enemy too, meaning, acting in harmful ways against them. They may be your enemies because of how they treat you, but you don’t treat them like so.

This means that **sometimes loving like Jesus is not about becoming best friends with everyone but not acting like an enemy against those that mean harm to us.**

One thing I have learned is that when people are treated like enemies they will act like enemies. But Jesus breaks that cycle on the cross and he is inviting us to do like so, as he said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” That is the path to happiness, peace, and fulfillment.

Last point. There is nothing we can do to overcompensate for failing to love. Even Jesus finds us at fault when we try to go around the responsibility of taken care of our relationships with others. Look at what he said:

…if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. Matthew 5:23,24

Can you think of a time when you chose to do something religious when God wanted you to repair a relationship? Jesus is telling us that restoring a broken relationship by forgiving or asking for forgiveness is an act of worship too. **God cares more about our relationships with others than our membership in a church.**

My friends, I want to invite you today to frame your faith in a different way. Instead of framing your spiritual life around religious practices, do so in how you relate to others.

I finish with this quote:

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” L.R. Knost