

What Jesus Taught Us About How to Build Beautiful Relationships

1. Warm up: Sunday's sermon began with some questions about things like the greatest song ever, the greatest athlete ever, and the greatest movie ever. Let's go with the third category. What would you say is the greatest movie ever?
2. Jesus was once asked one of those "greatest" questions. Someone asked him, "What is the greatest commandment?" He replied, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37. In other words, the greatest commandment is actually two commandments that are so intertwined, you can't have one without the other. On the one hand, we can't love God deeply without loving the people around us deeply, and on the other hand, we can't love the people around us deeply without loving God deeply. In this, Jeff suggested, we find life's single most important foundational principle for building beautiful relationships. So, on Sunday we explored both angles on Jesus' statement, starting with the proposition that we can't love God deeply without loving the people around us deeply.
 - a. I John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." What do you make of this verse? Suppose someone believes in their heart that Jesus is the Savior and places their faith in him, but they're cold and unloving to the people around them. Are they saved? Do they know God?
 - b. I Corinthians 13:2 says, "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Based on that verse, Jeff said, "On a scale of 1 to 10, I can't be an 8 in my relationship with God if I'm only a 4 in my relationship with others. If I'm a 4 in my relationships with others, I'm also a 4 in my relationship with God." Do you buy that? In other words, do you agree that the ultimate measure of the quality of our relationship with God is how well we related to the people around us? Why or why not?
3. Jeff said, "Clearly the Bible says we can't love God without loving the people around us well, but don't just tell me *what* the Bible says, I also want to know *why* it says it. Because if I don't understand the *why* behind the *what*, I can't fully live into the *what*. I want to know *why* loving God is inextricably intertwined with loving others." Jeff pointed us to two scriptures that offer us a big clue. John 1:1 introduces Jesus with these words, "In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. . . . All things came into being through him. . . . And the *Logos* became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son." The Greek word *Logos* means divine wisdom. So another title for Jesus is, the *Logos*, *i.e.*, the Wisdom of God. There's also a passage in the Old Testament where the Wisdom of God, *i.e.*, Jesus, is depicted as saying this, "When God established the heavens, I was there. . . .

When God marked out the foundations of the earth, there I was beside him, like a master worker . . . rejoicing in his inhabited world and *delighting in the human race*.” Proverbs 8:27. In other words, for some reason Jesus takes particular delight in us humans.

- a. Tell us about someone or something (past or present) that you take delight in? How would you describe to someone else what it feels like to delight in someone or something?
 - b. Jeff gave examples of how some of us delight in our pets and how parents delight in their children. He said that, if given the choice between someone blessing him directly or someone instead blessing his doggie, hands down Jeff would prefer that someone bless his doggie because that means far more to him. If you were given that same choice regarding someone you delight in, which choice would you make? Explain why you’d make that choice?
 - c. Tell us about a time someone hurt someone you delight in. How did that make you feel?
 - d. What does all the foregoing tell us about how Jesus feels about the people around us and why it’s impossible to truly love Him without loving those people?
 - e. When we hurt another person, how does that make Jesus feel?
4. In the second part of Sunday’s sermon, Jeff flipped the question from why we can’t love God deeply without loving the people around us, and instead focused on why we can’t love the people around us without loving God deeply. In other words, why is loving God essential to our ability to love people well? He suggested three reasons.
- a. First, as primates we’re naturally driven by our primal impulses and desires. In other words, we’re guided by our animal instincts. This is what the Bible calls “living in the flesh.” To rise about those impulses, we need a High Power in our life who has the authority to say, “No, we’re not simply going to act on primal impulses. I’m calling you to something higher, something more beautiful, and ultimately something more satisfying.” Tell us about a time when, acting on impulse, you did something that really hurt someone that you now really regret.
 - b. Tell us about a time when instead of acting on impulse, you sensed the voice of the Holy Spirit calling you to something higher and obeyed. What happened? How did that feel?
 - c. Scholars say that the earliest first-century Christian creed consisted of just three words, “Jesus is Lord.” At that time and in that culture, that meant Jesus is my boss. Do you feel you’ve reached the point in your life where you’re comfortable saying, “Jesus is my boss. What he says goes.”
5. Once we accept Jesus as Lord, the next step is to practice what he taught, which means intentionally overriding our primal behavioral habits and replacing with them with better

ones, so that gradually over time we gain self-control over our primal instincts and behave in the counterintuitive ways Jesus taught. Jeff called this “spiritual self-discipline.” Give us an example of a habitual primal way you are inclined to respond to people in relationship that you’re consciously trying to replace with something higher? How’s it going?

6. So, to review, without God, we can’t love others well because: (a) we need a Higher Power with the authority to call us to rise above our primal impulses; and (b) we need that Higher Power to help us develop new and better habitual patterns for how we respond to people. But there’s also a third factor. We need to be able to feel God’s grace in order to share it.
 - a. Tell us about a time when God – or someone God put in your life – showed you great grace. What happened? How did it feel to receive so much grace? Do you now find yourself wanting to share that grace with others?
 - b. Who’s someone in your life right now that really needs to experience God’s grace through you?
 - c. With all the foregoing as background, let’s close this evening by simply reading back through Sunday’s scripture, as printed below, hopefully with a whole new level of depth and insight.

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.