

40 Days of Community

Week 3

What Destroys Relationships And What Builds Them?

Well good morning everybody! It's good to see you all again and welcome to '40 Days of Community'! If this is your first week – a special welcome. What took you so long to discover the best thing happening in Berkhamsted on a Sunday morning? Today we're looking at relationships and, in particular, 4 things that destroy a relationship and 4 things that build them.

Right at the top of your outline, the Bible says in Romans 12:5, "*Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.*" Will you circle that word 'connected'? If you're a Christian then, whether you knew it or not, you are connected to the person next to you. Here's the problem: It's easy to get *disconnected* in relationships. Would you agree with that? It's very easy to get disconnected from your children, from your parents, from your brothers and sisters, your friends, your family, your husband and wife if you're married. It's easy to get disconnected from your church. It's so easy to drift away and become a prodigal.

And so, today we're going to look at what causes that. Why do relationships fall apart? You see, unfortunately we're not taught in school how to have healthy relationships. It's sort of assumed that we learn it ...somehow. So today, we're going to look at how relationships get destroyed, what destroys them and what builds them? And I'm very, very excited about what I'm going to share because you'll be able to apply it in almost every area of your life. So, God has said that

almost every relational problem comes down to one or more of four negative attitudes. Do you have them?

Number one: Selfishness. SELFISHNESS destroys relationships. It's the number one cause of conflict, of arguments, of divorce, of war even. James 4: 1-2 say this, *"What causes fights and quarrels, don't they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but you don't get it."* Everything negative starts because of our self-centeredness.

Now it's very easy for selfishness to creep into a relationship. You know, when you start a relationship, you work hard at being unselfish. Nothings too much trouble for the one you love. But then as time goes on, selfishness begins to creep in. You're not as ready to go the second mile any more. So, why can't we be more unselfish? Well there are a couple of reasons.

First, it is natural. It is human nature to be selfish. I don't think about you most of the time. I think about me, my needs, my interests, my hurts. How do I look? How do I feel? And you don't think about me, you think about yourself more than anybody else. It's natural to be selfish.

Now not only are we naturally selfish, secondly, it's our culture. Everything about our culture feeds our self-centeredness. Do you realise that every advertisement that comes out caters to your self-centeredness? Buy this car and you'll get the girl;

you'll look so cool; your friends will respect you. Because.. I'm worth it. Now self-centeredness *cannot* build relationships. Let's read together Proverbs 28:25, "*Selfishness only causes trouble.*" It only causes trouble.

Now if selfishness destroys relationships, then what builds them? SELFLESSNESS builds them. Now what does selflessness mean? It means a little bit less of me, and a little bit more of you. Philippians 2:4 says this, "*Look out for one another's interest, not just your own.*" Where can I learn selflessness? Well, it's when you're in relationship with other people, family, small group, church etc. that you learn to get along with people who are different from you. That's where you learn to be selfless. By turning up on time, by listening instead of always talking, by affirming someone who lacks confidence and so on.

Now look at this next verse, Galatians 6:7-8 says this, "*The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others and ignoring God, harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for it in his life is weeds. But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life and eternal life.*"

Now, this is a very important verse because it talks about the principle of sowing and reaping, and that's not only biblical, its common sense! What you sow, you're going to reap. In every area of your life. If you plant criticism, people are going to be critical of you. If you plant affirmation, people are going to affirm you.

Whatever you sow in life, you're going to reap back. Unfortunately, a lot of people go through life and never learn the greatest lesson, and they waste their life. They never learn to sow selflessness. They can't get beyond themselves.

Now notice God also says in this verse, "It's a growth process." He says, "*Letting God's spirit do the growth work in him...*" You see, it's not overnight. You don't learn to be unselfish by being zapped on a Sunday. In fact, you're not going to learn it in 40 days, sadly. It's going to take the rest of your life, because it is a growth process. And there is only one way you can do it, and that is with God's spirit in you.

>>> Break for a song <<<

Now here's the second thing that destroys relationships: **Pride**. PRIDE destroys relationships. In Proverbs 13:10, it says this, "*Pride leads to arguments.*" Now pride shows up in a lot of different ways:

- * It shows up first in criticism. If you are critical of other people, if you tend to be judgmental, to be a picky, picky perfectionist. You have a pride problem! That's the reason you are so critical: pride!

- * If you have a stubbornness, if you find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry." If you cannot ever admit it when you're wrong. You have a pride problem. The problem with pride is it's self-deceiving. Everybody else can see it but we can't. That's why we need small groups or a really good friend who will have the courage to tell you, "You're too proud." Because it's hard to see it in yourself. So the Bible says this in Proverbs 16:18, "*Pride will destroy a person. A proud attitude leads to*

*ruin.” The Message paraphrases it like this: **First pride then the crash, the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.***

So, pride destroys relationships. Is that you? HUMILITY builds them. That’s the antidote to pride: Humility. Listen to these 5 things that build relationships in 1Peter 3: 8. The Bible says, *“Live in harmony. Be sympathetic. Love each other. Have compassion, and be humble.”* The first 4 really are built on the 5th one, the ability to be humble. You know, when I meet an older person, I’m not particularly impressed by how great a career they had or how successful they were or how much money they made. What impresses me is whether or not they have learned to be humble. I’ve met some great and humble old folks... and I love them dearly.

How are you and I going to grow in humility? Because that’s a tall order. How does that happen in our lives? It happens by letting Jesus Christ begin to control our thoughts and hearts and attitudes and reactions. He has got to be a part of this. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:23-24, *“Let the Spirit change your way of thinking, and make you into a new person.”* How do I become a new person? How do I start to think in a different way? By allowing God’s Spirit to change me, day-by-day.

If you want to have more humility, spend time with Jesus Christ because he is humble. Look at this next verse in the outline, Philippians 2:3, 5-6, *“Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Your attitude should be the same*

as that the Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God."

No one has ever done anything more humble than Jesus, coming from heaven to earth to become a man to live with us and give his life for us. And, when I spend time building a relationship with him, that enables me to begin to become more humble and that builds relationships. Humility builds relationships – try it!

Now, there is a third struggle we all face, and that is the struggle of insecurity. INSECURITY destroys relationships. The Bible talks about this over in Proverbs 29:25 when it says, *"The fear of human opinion disables."* How true is that! When I'm so insecure that all I can think about is *your* opinion and what *you* think of me, that disables my life. And when you're so insecure that you live in fear of my opinion then that destroys your life. In fact insecurity, or the fear of others opinions, can cause us to try to control each other, and that destroys relationships. >>> So watch this clip <<< from *Finding Nemo*: ***** Did you see that? Nemo's dad was full of fear. And it brought a barrier between him and his son, Nemo.

You know, it's an amazing dilemma that we as human beings have. We long to be close, but we also fear being close. We long to have intimacy with others, but we are also scared to death of having intimacy with others. Would you write this down: Insecurity prevents intimacy. You can't get close to somebody if there is

fear in the relationship, which is why living together doesn't work in the long run because you never know when somebody is going to walk out. There's no lifetime commitment, so I'm going to hold something back because what if it doesn't work? But even in many marriages there is a fear of intimacy. Oh sure, there can be sexual relations taking place but that's not necessarily the same as intimacy. Where there is real intimacy in a relationship fear is banished.

Now what do we fear in relationships? Well, we fear a couple of things. First, we fear exposure. We fear that someone is going to find out what we're really like? So we hide our true selves. And this is man's oldest fear, all the way back to Adam, the first man. In Genesis 3:10, he says, *"I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid."* When we're afraid, we hide ourselves. We cover up. We wear masks. We fear exposure of our emotional nakedness.

But there is a fear even deeper than that, and it is the fear of rejection. And this may be the greatest fear in human beings: The fear of being rejected. We've all been rejected at some point, and we know how much that hurts. And so, we fear it and we close ourselves off and say, "I'll never let anybody hurt me again," and we build up walls.

Now maybe you have been hurt by rejection by somebody, an ex boyfriend, a friend, a parent who said, "You're never going to amount to anything, or you're not good enough." And you felt that sting of rejection. Maybe you even felt it by a so-

called 'Christian'. If you have then I would say to you, "I'm sorry." I mean it, I am really sorry, and God was also grieved at your rejection. In fact, if anybody understands rejection, it's Jesus Christ. Remember, they nailed him to a cross. That is the ultimate rejection. So he understands how you feel.

But as your Pastor, I would beg you, please, please, don't let that harden your heart. Don't build up a wall. That's a self-imposed prison that you don't want to be in. And when you won't let anybody get close to you because "I'll never let anybody hurt me again," you're making a terrible mistake. You're not living. You're just existing, and it's my job as your Pastor to help you and to encourage you and to say, "Take the risk. Have the courage to risk loving again." Because if you will take that risk and open up your life and if you'll lower the barriers and let somebody have the potential to hurt you, you'll come alive again in a way you have never ever experienced. Ask God for the courage to take that risk again, to be open, to be vulnerable. Open the door and let the boogiemaster out and you'll discover he's not as big as you thought he was.

You don't have to share it with everybody, but you need to tell somebody. You were never meant to go through life with secrets. In fact, you are as only sick as your secrets. Write that down. You are only as sick as your secrets and if you're living in fear, you're not really living. Allow someone to work on this with you. That's what loving relationships are all about.

So, Insecurity destroys relationships. What builds them? We all know the answer to this: LOVE builds relationships. The Bible says in 1 John 4:18, "*Love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. If we're afraid, it shows that His love has not been perfected in us.*" How does that work? How does love expel all fear?

Here's what it does: It takes the focus off of you, and it puts the focus on them. That's how it makes a difference. And how do we find that power to focus on other people? It comes from realising how much God loves you. Realize that he loves you more than you could ever imagine. The moment you begin to realize how much God loves you, "I don't have to prove myself anymore. I don't have to spend my life trying to impress other people because I already know God loves me." Do you know how freeing that is? D'you know how enjoyable it is to live life that way? All of a sudden, my identity, my self-worth, they are not caught up in what you think of me.

How can we get that kind of confidence? The Bible tells us in 1 John 4:15-17, "*All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them.*" We know how much God loves us, and we put our trust in him. God is love. And, "*As we live in God, our love grows more and more perfect, so we will not be afraid.*" And you might circle the word 'grows.' This grows, this is a lifelong process. This is a journey. This is a little bit every day. If I try to have this confidence all at once, I'm going to have to fake it. That's the only way you can do it quickly. It's something that grows little by little every day.

You can't defeat insecurity overnight. It doesn't happen for any of us, but you can take the first step right now. And that is beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ or strengthening your relationships with Jesus Christ. When you say yes to Jesus Christ, you're saying yes to a kind of love that can throw fear out the back door of your life.

Now the fourth enemy of community is resentment. RESENTMENT destroys relationships. Job 5:2 says this, "*To worry yourself to death with resentment is a foolish, senseless thing to do.*"

Now everybody blows it. We all make mistakes. We all sin. I sin. You sin. The Pope sins. Everybody does. We are all sinners. That means I'm not perfect. I don't have 20:20 vision. I don't measure up to God's standard. I don't even measure up to my own standards. I disappoint myself a lot of the times. So because we're all imperfect, you're going to hurt other people and other people are going to hurt you in life, intentionally and unintentionally. So you're going to be hurt in life, that's a fact. What's more important is, what do you do with that hurt? What you do with it is more important than the hurt. Are you going to allow it to make you better? Or are you going to allow it to make you bitter? Better or bitter?

Now let me clarify something: Anger is not always wrong but resentment *is* always wrong. It's when you pile up anger in your heart. It's frozen anger. Now, why does God say, "Don't do this." Two reasons: First, when you get resentful, you

stop thinking clearly. Your logic gets distorted. Your perspective gets clouded. Your vision gets all mixed up, and you don't think rationally when your emotions are involved.

Not only do you not think straight, you start acting in self-defeating ways. The most foolish things that have ever been done in history have been done in revenge or in retaliation or in resentment. Notice what the Bible says, Psalm 73, *"Since my heart was embittered,"* that means resentful, 'I'm bitter,' *"and my soul was deeply wounded. I was stupid and I could not understand."* In other words, I didn't think straight and I started doing self-defeating behavior. God says, "I don't want you to do that." One of the purposes of the small group is to help you think straight when you've been hurt. Because when you get hurt, you need other people around you, who are not so emotionally involved in your situation and can think more rationally. They might just stop you doing something daft. See, this is how we grow.

So what's the antidote to resentment? The antidote to resentment is forgiveness. FORGIVENESS builds relationships just like resentment tears it down. And if you're going to have, say, a life long marriage, you're going to need massive doses of forgiveness, massive doses of forgiveness. Don't you?

Colossians 3:13, would you read this verse aloud with me? *“You must make allowances for each others’ faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”*

Now, why should I forgive other people? Well, there are three reasons:

- First, resentment doesn’t work, it only makes you miserable.
- Second, you have been forgiven by God.
- Third, you’re going to need more forgiveness in the future and so you better offer it to others.

We pray in the Lord’s prayer, *“Forgive us our debts, our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.”* God, I want you to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else. “Whoa, do I really want that?” You see, we forgive because God says you need to forgive for your own sake. You say, “Billy, I can’t do it. I just... I cannot forgive that person.” That’s why you need Jesus Christ. That’s why you need Jesus Christ because you’re right, you can’t do it on your own. Human love runs out. You need God’s supernatural love in you.

Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to let off the hook? Now let me explain what forgiveness is not.

- Forgiveness is not making excuses - they hurt you and it was real.
- Forgiveness is not minimizing the hurt. It hurt!
- Forgiveness is not just, saying it was no big deal. It was a big deal!
- Forgiveness is not saying it wasn’t wrong. It was wrong!

So what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is letting go of the pain and letting go of my right to get even. Why would anybody do that? For your own sake. Because you are living in misery the longer you hold on to it. I know that this is true because I've had to do it. Some of you are still allowing people from your past to hurt you in the present and that's dumb. They cannot hurt you anymore. The past is past. And every time you hold onto that grudge, you are perpetuating your own pain. They can't hurt you anymore. They only hurt you if you refuse to let it go.

You see, resentment turns your heart into a desert, and it dries you up emotionally. And you don't have anything left to give to anybody else. You don't have anything to give because you are so stuck in the past, you can't get on with the future. And it turns you into a desert, and you're dried up.

But God brought you here this morning because he's got some good news for you. Look at the next verse. Here's what God says to you, *"The Lord says forget what happened before, and don't think about the past. I'm going to do something new in your life, and I will make rivers on a dry land. I'm going to turn that desert into an oasis."* Now you may have had some relational disasters in your life, welcome to the human race. Everybody has had some relational disasters. Everybody. What are you going to do with them? God wants to start something totally new in your life today, right in the middle of '40 Days of Community' and it starts with opening

up your life to Jesus Christ and letting him fill you with his love on a moment-by-moment basis. Let's bow our heads.

As we close, let me ask you five very personal questions:

- Do you need to experience God's forgiveness?
- Who do you need to be more unselfish with?
- Who have you been critical or judgmental of?
- To whom do you need to say, "Please forgive me."
- Who do you need to forgive?

You know, all four of the antidotes to resentment and insecurity and selfishness and pride, all four of the antidotes are found in a relationship to Jesus Christ. You get that relationship straightened out and all your other ones will fall into place. You need to allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord, the manager, the boss of your life. Let him fill you with his love and you'll start to have great relationships with other people.

So, if you feel able, pray this prayer, in your heart, "Dear God, You've seen every relationship I've ever had, the good, the bad and the ugly. And you know how selfishness, and pride, and insecurity and resentment messes them up. I admit that I need your help, Jesus, in my life and in my relationships. So as much as I understand, I ask you Jesus to come into my life and live through me, and put your love in me. I want that fresh start that you offer. In your name I pray, Amen."

Ask Elders to come forward and be available to pray with people who need help.