

CAN YOU Relate?

WISE UP

We are biologically, neurologically, sociologically and emotionally designed to be in relationships. Relationships can be both our source of greatest joy or the source of our greatest pain. Yet most of us do more maintenance on our cars than we do on our relationships. Why is that?

How do you bring wisdom your relationships, and keep them healthy? How do you maintain your integrity, remain truthful, give others the benefit of the doubt, listen deeply, and set aside your own opinions and ego? How willing are you to examine your difficult relationships and then take the steps necessary to repair or reconcile them? Are there relationships in your life that shouldn't be repaired? Why? Where do we find the wisdom necessary to navigate these issues?

Do you think your own identity and self-worth impact how you relate to others? Consider these two concepts:

- "Remember who you are and whose you are."
- "Hurting people hurt people."

What does it mean to remember who and whose you are? Who and whose are you? If you understood without a single doubt that you are enough, that you are cherished beyond imagination, and there's nothing you have done or could do to earn it ... would that change the way you see the world? Would that change the way you relate to other people? Would it change your ability to love them well, and your ability to extend grace, patience and generosity? Why? Could remembering who and whose you are actually improve your relationships with others? Does it help to remember that everyone around you is equally cherished, and can also claim these words?

What does it mean that hurting people hurt people? Is this true in your life? In your own worst moments, when you lash out at others, how are you feeling? Are you more likely to lash out when you forget who and whose you are, when you don't feel like you're enough? Why? Do you suppose that's true for other people, too? What changes when you consider that someone else's mean or hurtful behavior flows from their own suffering or need?

DAY 1

What is wisdom? Is being wise the same thing as being smart, or educated? Do you know any really smart people who don't have great relational skills? What part does wisdom play in relationships?

DAY 2

The reading says that "wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder." What does this mean? Are self-centeredness and ego at the core of unhealthy relationships? Can you think of any examples, obvious or subtle, of ego messing up a relationship?

DAY 3

Are you unconditionally loved by God? For real, or is that just a catch phrase? Are your neighbors unconditionally loved by God? What about the people you don't like, or the people who have wronged you in the past? Are we called to love them unconditionally? Is that even possible? What do you do when that's just too overwhelming?

DAY 4

The reading says that wisdom leading to healthy relationships is pure, with integrity. What is integrity? Why is integrity, or trust, so vital in relationships? Can you have a healthy relationship without it? Why, or why not?

DAY 5

Are there any relationships in your life in which integrity or trust have been violated or breached? Is addressing and healing that breach a priority for you? Should it be? Why, or why not? How can you build, or re-build, trust?

DAY 6

Are you in the habit of giving people the benefit of the doubt? What would it take for you to put aside your stories about people's malicious intentions and instead assume the kindest things about them, and interpret everything they say and do in the best possible light? Is that a choice you get to make? Is it a difficult choice to make? Are there repercussions for that choice? What are they?

DAY 7

Do you ever find yourself finishing people's sentences? Thinking about what you're going to say next rather than listening to what others are saying? Criticizing everyone else's ideas? What changes if you listen more? Is it harder than it sounds? Why? What gets in the way?

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I'd like to start with a little informal survey today:

- Raise your hand if you usually go to a doctor for an annual physical.
- Raise your hand if you do an annual review with a financial advisor.
- Raise your hand if you get a dental checkup at least once a year.
- Raise your hand if you've had a technician come to your home to check on the operating health of your furnace or air conditioner in the last couple of years.
- Finally, raise your hand if you've taken your car to a mechanic in the last couple of years because an engine warning light came on.

Most of us regularly assess our physical health, our financial health and our dental health. That's good! And we do preventive maintenance on our cars and our homes. That's good too! But when is the last time you got a relational checkup? When is the last time you did preventive maintenance on the relationships in your life? For most of us the answer is, "Aaahhhhhhhh".

Relationships are the most important aspect of human life. We are hard-wired for relationships. We are biologically, neurologically, sociologically and emotionally designed to be in relationships. Relationships are both our source of greatest joy when they are healthy, and they are the source of our greatest pain when they are unhealthy. And yet most of us do more maintenance on our cars than we do on our relationships. What's up with that?

That's why we're starting a new series this week entitled "Can You Relate?" It's a series about relational health. We're going to learn practical wisdom from God's Word about developing and maintaining healthy relationships. How many of you have a relationship in your life that you wish

were better? Don't elbow the person sitting next to you! If you put into practice the wisdom we're going to explore in this series you're likely to have healthier relationships for the holidays. Sounds good to you? Then let's get going.

Today we're going to re-visit a passage of scripture from the book of James. As you may know we spent the entire summer in James...and it was awesome! James is filled with wisdom for daily life. You may recall that a few weeks ago Terri Elton preached about wisdom and she reminded us that wisdom isn't about knowledge. It isn't about being educated. Wisdom comes from God and it's a way of relating. It about what you do, not what you think. We all know lots of really smart people who have really bad relational skills. How is that possible? Because you can be really smart and yet lack wisdom. And wisdom is the pathway to healthy relationships. Let's read James 3:13-18 together see what James says about wisdom and healthy relationships. [NLT]

One of the things that I love about James is that he gets right to the point, and he says it "plain". And today's reading is no exception. Want to know what's at the core of a lot of unhealthy relationships? James names it. It's ego. Self-centeredness. James says, "Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder." Healthy relationships are built upon a healthy foundation of give and take. James says that we're foolish if we come to relationships primarily for what we can get out of them, when it's all about our agenda. In my experience relationships become unhealthy when we expect from others what only God can ultimately provide – our core identity and need for unconditional love. When we look to others for those things, we're setting up our relationships for failure. We're being foolish.

And so, James points us to wisdom that leads to healthy relationships. He writes, "But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere." James says that doing these things consistently will lay a solid foundation for healthy relationships. While each one of those wisdom nuggets is worthy of its own sermon, this week I want to challenge you to put three of them into practice.

First, James says that wisdom that leads to healthy relationships is pure. What does that mean? James is referring to integrity. Integrity means we are the same on the inside as the outside. It means we're honest and genuine, without hidden motives or hidden agendas. It means we do what we say, and say what we mean. And

why does James list this first when he talks about wisdom that leads to healthy relationships? Because integrity is the foundation of trust, and establishing trust is “job one” in any healthy relationship. If you can’t trust me or I can’t trust you, we can’t have a healthy relationship.

In a relationship trust is built one word and one action at a time. Every time we speak the truth, we make a deposit into a relational trust account. Every time we do what we say we’re going to do, we make a deposit into a relational trust account. Every time we’re honest about what we’re thinking and feeling, especially when it’s hard to express it, we make a deposit into a relational trust account. That’s how you live with integrity. That’s how you earn trust. That’s how you build a healthy relationship. And whenever we fail to do those things, whenever we live foolishly, we make a withdrawal from that trust account. And when the failure is big enough you can empty the entire account and you start all over again.

If you want to be wise in your relationships, if you want healthy relationships, refuse to compromise your integrity. Trust is the foundation of every healthy relationship.

Second, according to James wisdom that leads to healthy relationships is gentle. Another way to say it is, be considerate. In Philippians 4:5 Paul says, “Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.” I looked that verse up in the original Greek and do you know what that word “all” means? It means...all. We’re to be considerate in ALL that we do. Every situation. Even when people are inconsiderate to us. That’s what Jesus meant by turning the other cheek. It isn’t easy, but it’s wise.

There are lots of things we could say about being gentle or considerate but let me highlight just one that I think is really important and wise in developing healthy relationships – choosing to put the best construction on what people say and do. This is an amazingly powerful and challenging discipline. It invites us to put aside our stories about people’s malicious intentions and to assume the best and kindest things about them. Here’s how Martin Luther put it in his small catechism, “We are to come to the defense of our neighbor, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.” That’s a choice we get to make, and when we make it, when we give people the benefit of the doubt, we’re making a wise choice for healthy relationships.

For instance, not long ago I was sitting at a restaurant waiting for someone who had scheduled an appointment with me. That person didn’t show up. So I had a choice. I could tell myself a story like, “How rude that person is to waste my time” or “that person doesn’t value me and my

time.” Or I could tell myself a story like this, “I hope my friend is OK” or “Maybe I’m the one who got the date, time or location wrong.” We always have a choice in how we’ll respond to people and circumstances, and if we want healthy relationships we’ll choose to be gentle, considerate, always interpreting the things people say and do in the best possible light.

Finally, James says that wisdom that leads to healthy relationships is willing to yield. It means you’re open to reason. You’re not stubborn or defensive, but allow for discussion. How do you know if you’re willing to yield? You know by how well you listen. Fools do all the talking. Wise people are great listeners. Do you ever find yourself finishing people’s sentences? Do you ever find yourself thinking about what you’re going to say next rather than listening to what the other person is saying? Do you have all the right answers and find yourself criticizing everyone else’s ideas? Guess what? That’s foolish, and it creates unhealthy relationships. Wise people are quick to listen and slow to speak, and their relationships are healthier.

Do you know who was the master at being willing to yield? Jesus was. Jesus was filled with wisdom, but he always listened to people – their stories, their ideas, their hopes and their pains. And ultimately Jesus yielded his life to people who were clearly in the wrong. He laid his life down for his friends. Are you willing to lay down your opinion, your need to be right, your ego for the sake of others? For the sake of love? For the sake of healthier relationships? It isn’t easy, but that’s what wise people do.

So, how wise are you in your relationships? How are you doing at maintaining your integrity, being truthful, reliable and trustworthy? How are you at being considerate, at always giving people the benefit of the doubt, putting the best possible construction on their words and actions? And how are you doing at yielding, at listening deeply, setting aside your opinion and your ego? I can’t speak for you, but I can say for myself, I do a lot of foolish things in my relationships. I’m in need of a lot of wisdom. I’m in need of a change in heart and mind. And if you are too, I’ve got good news. Jesus delights in filling willing people with wisdom. In James 1:5 it says, “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.”

So here’s what I want us to do. I want you to bring to mind someone with whom you’d like to have a better relationship. Bring their name to mind. Close your eyes and bring their face into clear view. Now let’s pray for some wisdom to make that a healthier relationship....

CAN YOU Relate?

WISE UP

Relationships can be both our source of greatest joy or our greatest pain. Why don't we spend more energy maintaining them? How can we be more wise in our relationships?



Do you think your own identity impacts your friendships? If you understood without a single doubt that you are loved unconditionally by God, that you're cherished beyond imagination, and that there's nothing you can do to either earn or end it ... would that change the way you relate to other people? Would knowing you're loved change your ability to love others well, and your ability to extend extra grace, patience and generosity? Why?

What does it mean that "hurting people hurt people"? In your own worst moments, when you lash out at others, how are you feeling? Are you more likely to lash out when you feel bad about something? Why? Do you think that's true for other people, too? What changes when you realize that someone is being mean or hurtful because they are sad or hurting? Does that make it easier to make up?

HOW CAN THESE IDEAS IMPACT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS THIS WEEK?