

Group Resource

Sermon Notes – Sunday, April 6, 2014

Love, Sex + Godly Relationships

Message: The Joy of Reconciliation

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21 / Ephesians 5:29

- I. In this series, we have examined the questions: (1) **What is real love?** (2) **How do we accept and live in God’s perfect and real love?** (3) **How do we reflect God’s love in our actions towards others?** (4) **How are intimacy and relationships built on the foundation of Godly love?** (5) **“What do healthy friendships look like in the kingdom of God?”** (6) **What are the seasons of relationships that build up towards marriage?** This week we address the joy that we can find in relationship while working through conflict.
- II. In relationships, we can find joy in things that aren’t always comfortable.
 - a. This type of joy only comes when we appreciate the lasting relationship value that can be produced from temporary discomfort. In marriage relationships, we must consider the relationship bond more valuable than the breaches that occur. This perspective allows us to truly fight for reconciliation in the marital relationship.
 - b. Relationships (friends, family, marital) die when we are no longer willing to fight for those relationships.
 - i. In certain friendships, it is the will of God that those relationships end or that boundaries are adjusted in the relationship.
 - ii. However, when we seek to avoid discomfort and conflict in our relationships at all cost, we can fall into the trap of giving up on relationships prematurely.
 - c. The book of Genesis tells us the story of Joseph, who had a heart for reconciliation with his family.
 - i. Joseph was mistreated by his brothers. They sold him into slavery and lied to their father about Joseph’s demise. While Joseph identified the breaches that had occurred in the family relationship, He acknowledged that God was working THROUGH each breach. Joseph declared that God sent him ahead of his family to preserve a remnant on earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance.
 - ii. In marriage, God unites us the spouses that we need. Our purpose in marriage is much greater than getting what we want, but the opportunity to be God’s ambassador and serve our spouse and their needs.
- III. Christ models relationship reconciliation with His actions towards the church.
 - a. Ephesians 5:25-29 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church —*
- IV. Feeding and caring for our relationships means that we must proactively sow seeds of love while simultaneously caring for the areas of our relationships that experience breaches.
 - a. Relationship breaches don’t fix themselves automatically. We must balance the responsibility to show grace to one another with honestly sharing when the relationship has experienced a breach.
 - b. It is the responsibility of all parties in a relationship to work on repairing breaches. “The fatal flaw of human wisdom is that it promises that you can change your relationships without needing to change yourself.” Lane, Timothy S.; Paul David Tripp (2006-11-01). *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (p. 7). New Growth Press. Kindle Edition.
- V. If we want to thrive in our relationships, especially marriage, we have to discover the joy of things that are not always comfortable. We must walk in the joy of 1) encountering and resolving conflict; 2) asking for and extending forgiveness; and 3) living in reconciliation
- VI. **The joy of encountering and resolving conflict**
 - a. Some of us have been taught to “avoid conflict” at all cost. The only way that you can completely avoid conflict is by avoiding people. However, you are still likely to experience conflict with yourself.
 - b. Conflict doesn’t always mean that our relationship is doomed or failed. Rather, encountering and resolving conflict provides Godly opportunities for redemption and reconciliation.

- i. Encountering conflict is full of risks and the potential for great hurt, but over time, resisting and ignoring conflict will always have a higher relational cost.
- c. Why should we desire to encounter and resolve conflict? In Romans 12, the Apostle Paul describes a 'sincere' love that wrestles through relationship difficulties and conflicts.
 - i. Verse 9 - *Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*
 - ii. Verse 10 - *take delight in honoring each other*
 - iii. Verse 14 - *Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.*
 - iv. Verse 16 - *Live in harmony with each other.*
 - v. Verse 18 - *Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*
- d. When we resist dealing with conflict, we change these scriptures to mean: Hate what is *DIFFERENT*. Hold tightly to what is *NON-CONFRONTATIONAL*. We take delight in *PASSIFYING* rather than honoring each other.
- e. Encountering conflict means that we don't ignore breaches in the relationship, even if we don't believe that we are the cause of the breach. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus taught the people to leave their gift at the altar and be reconciled if they know that their brother or sister had something against them.
- f. Romans 12:9 reminds us to not "pretend to love others. Really love them." We are not sincere in our love someone if we have a wall up and we are not willing to deal with or resolve the issues that are causing the wall to exist.
- g. From a practical level, what do we need in order to experience joy in encountering and resolving conflict.
 - i. It is always hard to find joy in unexpected conflict. Having proper expectations provides opportunities to maximize the depth of our joy.
 - ii. In marriage, there are 5 general areas of conflict: money, sex, work, parenting/family and housework. We don't have to run from these difficult situations but pray for God's grace to lovingly encounter and resolve challenges in these areas. These are all a part of the process of becoming 'one flesh.'
- h. In dealing with conflict, it is helpful to recognize our distinctive conflict personalities and how these traits may help/hinder us in the midst of resolving a conflict. Aggressors or rhinos want a firm resolution to conflicts. They often push until they are satisfied with the response. Hedgehogs tend to retreat during conflicts. They are likely to shut-down or disengage when the conflict has gotten too difficult to resolve.
- i. In either case, God wants us to live in a place of reconciliation. Often the only way to get there is by dealing with the conflict.

VII. The joy of asking for and extending forgiveness

- a. Having joy in asking for and extending forgiveness starts with a very basic question - When we look at our spouses, what do we see, a person or an object?
- b. If we see our spouses as an object, we limit our spouse's purpose to giving us what we want. When our spouse doesn't fulfill our needs in the manner or timeframe that we desire, we are easily frustrated and annoyed. It feels like a vending machine that has malfunctioned and withheld from us a purchased item. In this case, forgiveness is painful because we feel that our spouse (object) has not met our intended purpose.
- c. When we see our spouse as a person, we honor them and acknowledge their value and importance in our lives. We ask for and extend forgiveness because we don't want to diminish the value of that relationship based upon unresolved conflict.
- d. Forgiveness means to release someone else from the penalty of a breach so the relationship can be restored. We sacrifice our 'right' to get even.
- e. The Apostle Paul described sincere love as love that doesn't repay evil with evil.
 - i. ^{ROMANS 12:17} Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:
 - "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
 - if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
 - In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."
 - ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- f. The joy of forgiveness doesn't solely come from extending forgiveness to others but also from desiring to receive forgiveness. When we value a relationship, we take ownership when we fall short so that our relationship can be reconciled.

VIII. The joy of living in reconciliation

- a. All earthly relationships involve fallen human beings. Living in reconciliation doesn't demand perfection from others but finds joy in modeling Godly love while walking alongside imperfect people.
- b. A skewed view of relationships causes us to see ourselves as perfect and everyone else as imperfect. We play the role of God by keeping our scorecard of how many times others have offended us.
- c. Living in reconciliation means that we relinquish the God card and desire that God's best is accomplished in our relationship. We humbly allow God to be the Lord of our life, AND the Lord of our relationships. Our relationships thrive when we make a determination to build each other up, rather than to tear each other down.
- d. Ephesians 4:29 reminds us to "not let **any** unwholesome talk come out of [our] mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." We ought to find joy in everyday opportunities to build others up and to be built up in love.

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Scripture: Romans 12:9-21 / Ephesians 5:29

- 1) What types of conflict are likely to happen in relationships? Give an example of a conflict that came up in one of your relationship (friend, family, marriage). How did you resolve the conflict? Was there a lasting relationship value that was produced from resolving the conflict? Can you recognize any breaches in your past or current relationships that you have not reconciled?
- 2) To reconcile means to settle differences and restore a relationship because of love. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. In your own words, how has God reconciled us to himself? How does God fight for your relationship with Him?
- 3) What do you find challenging about the process of encountering and resolving conflict? Pastor Joseph said that “when we seek to avoid discomfort and conflict in our relationships at all cost, we can fall into the trap of giving up on relationships prematurely.” Has this ever happened to you? Why is it important to fight for a relationship? When would it dishonor God to continue fighting for a relationship?
- 4) Author Timothy Lane writes, “The fatal flaw of human wisdom is that it promises that you can change your relationships without needing to change yourself.” Read the list of 5 common areas of marital conflict. If you are single, what are things that you can change in your own life to prepare yourself for marriage? If you are married, what changes can you make in your life so that your relationship thrives in these areas?
- 5) Read Colossians 3:12-15. How do these Scriptures teach us how to find joy in asking for and receiving forgiveness? What does it mean to take ownership of asking for forgiveness when we have wronged someone else?
- 6) In conflict resolution, there are aggressors and hedgehogs. Which are you? How can you encounter and resolve conflict with a person who has a similar conflict personality? What about someone with opposite traits? How do you keep sight of the goal of reconciliation when dealing with different conflict personalities?