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“WHAT DESTROYS RELATIONSHIPS...AND WHAT BUILDS THEM?”

Romans 12:5

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40 Days of Community, Part 3 based on a sermon by Rick Warren

“*Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.*” Rom 12:5.

I had a funny story of how my mom got 2 “D’s” in college: one in ‘Marriage and the Family’ and the other in ‘Child Psychology.’ But the pace of the world today, and the major influence the TV and computer media has over us, makes today’s message imperative, and much more serious. Because of bad and exhausting relationships, we want to retreat into our cocoon, when the answers lie in healthy relationships with people.

It’s easy to get *disconnected* in relationships...from your children, from your parents, from your brothers and sisters, your friends your family, your husband or wife. It’s easy to get disconnected from your church, from your small group. Today, we’re going to look at what causes that. Why do relationships fall apart? Why do relationships go bad? What destroys relationships and how do you rebuild them?

Before we get into them, whether it’s your family or your small group; let me give you a little secret warning. You’re going to have differences in your small group. The only people who agree on everything are dead people. So if you’re getting along in perfect harmony in your group it means either, one, you’re not being honest. Or two, you’re all dead. So today we’re going to look at how relationships get destroyed. What destroys them, and what builds them up.

Enemy number one: Selfishness. Selfishness *destroys* relationships. It is the number one cause of conflict, the number one cause of arguments, the number one cause of divorce. It is the number one cause of war. James 4:1-2 says 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 starts because of our self-centeredness.

It’s very easy for selfishness to creep into relationships. When you start a relationship you work real hard at being unselfish. Like in dating. You’re very unselfish at the start of a relationship. But then as time goes on selfishness begins to creep in. One guy said, “In the first year of marriage my wife used to greet me at the door and the dog came barking. Now my dog greets me at the door...” We just stop making the effort. If there were more courting in marriage they’d be fewer marriages in court. You have to date your mate.

We all know that selfishness destroys relationships. We know this. So why can’t we change? Why can’t we be more unselfish? 2 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, who’s hurt me. And you don’t think about me. You think about yourself more than anybody else. It’s natural. Second, not only are we naturally selfish. We’re made that way. Our culture and everything in it feeds our self-centeredness. Every advertisement that comes out caters to our self-centeredness. “Have it your way.... We do it all for you... Obey your thirst!” Most of the ads mean “Whatever your urges are, do it.” How juvenile, how animalistic can you get? Proverbs 28:25 “*Selfishness only causes trouble.*”

A lot of people say, “If there is a God, why is there evil in the world?” That’s really not all that hard. It’s because we’re ALL selfish. It causes conflict, wars and more. I don’t have a problem of why there’s evil in the world when we’re all self-centered. **The bigger issue is, why is there good? Why is there good in the world?** There’s only one reason why there’s good in the world. Because of God. Without God there would be no good. God can bring divine resources to bear in your struggle when you open up to Him.

If selfishness destroys relationships then it is **selflessness** that builds them. Selflessness builds relationships. It means a little bit less of me and a little bit more of you. It means I think a little bit less of myself and I think little bit more of you.

Philippians 2:4 says this “*Look out for one another’s interests not just your own.*” God loves to teach us selflessness in a small group, and in a family. If you cut yourself off, you’re not going to grow. So practice...by showing up, by accepting new people, by inviting someone new in, by listening to people in your group all the way through and ignoring your desire to break in with your own story. That’s selflessness.

Selflessness taps into some basic truths that God has built into the universe: You reap what you sow. What you plant, you’re going to reap. You can plant what you want: criticism and anger, or affirmation and joy. Quit planting the bad stuff! Aren’t you sick of it? God has wired the universe that the more unselfish you are, the more He blesses you. Why? Because He wants you and me to become like His Son, Jesus. BTW, the end of this month we’re collecting 500lbs of food for local ministries of FIA and Dex Fam Serv. Look at Gal. 5:16 “*Live freely, animated and motivated by God’s Spirit. Then you won’t feed the compulsions of selfishness.*” We’re compulsive. Only when God’s Spirit is in you can you make selflessness a lifestyle.

Enemy number 2: Pride. Pride destroys relationships. It shows up in criticism. If you are critical of others, or judgmental, or always comparing, or stubborn, you have a pride problem. If you can’t say “I’m sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me,” you have a pride problem. Even if it wasn’t only your fault.

The problem with pride is it’s self-deceiving. Everybody else can see it but you can’t. When I’m full of pride, I can’t see it. Proverbs 16:18 says “*Pride will destroy a person: a proud attitude leads to ruin.*” Listen to the Message paraphrase “*First pride: then the crash - the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.*” If you’ve been falling hard, that just shows how big your ego was.

Pride keeps us from apologizing, and that destroys relationships. But **humility** is the antidote to pride. Humility builds relationships. Listen to these five things that build relationships from 1 Peter 3:8: “*Live in harmony, be sympathetic, love each other, have compassion, be humble.*” Those five are really built on the fifth one. The ability to be humble. This is a pretty good model for small groups. These are what we all really want in our families, small groups and relationships. We want to live in harmony and be sympathetic and love each other. We want to have compassion and be humble. Join in this week. And if you haven’t joined in “because you don’t need a group”, take a pride check. Everybody, not “everybody else,” needs spiritual friends...everybody.

Enemy number 3. The struggle of insecurity. Insecurity destroys relationships. The Bible talks about this in Proverbs 29:25 “*The fear of human opinion disables.*” When I’m so insecure that all I think about is your opinion and what you think of me, I’m crippled. I’m in bondage.

Insecurity prevents intimacy. You can’t get close to somebody if there’s fear in the relationship. Just like Adam. “*I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.*” Genesis 3:10. These days, it’s not so much physical nakedness that scares people; it’s emotional nakedness. So we hide; because what if somebody understands and finds out my fears, my faults, my dark side? Our insecurity makes us dishonest and hands us bricks to build up walls. It leads to isolation. But it goes deeper, to the fear of rejection.

Maybe you have been hurt by rejection by somebody – a boyfriend, an ex, or a parent who said, “You’re not good enough.” Maybe you even felt it by a so called “Christian”. Or maybe you felt it in a church or in small group. If so I would say to you, I am sorry. I am really sorry. Even God grieved at your rejection. If

anybody understands rejection it's Jesus Christ. Remember they nailed Him to a cross. That is the ultimate rejection. He understands how you felt.

But as your pastor I would beg you, please, please don't let that harden your heart. That's self-imposed prison you don't want to be in. It is my job as your pastor to help you and to encourage you and say, take the risk. Ask God for the courage to take that risk again, to be open, to be vulnerable. Find someone besides your computer or your TV that you can share soul to soul with. You need Jesus. I need Jesus.

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

Love takes the focus off of you and puts the focus on them. People ask me “Do you get nervous when you're talking in front of so many people?” Yes! But it's not about me. What makes the difference is getting the focus off me and on you. The minute I start forgetting about myself and what I look like is the minute I start thinking about how much I love you and how much God loves you and how much we want to love God together, fear is not an issue. In any relationship. When you focus on the other person you have the power to throw fear out of your life.

How do we find the power to focus on others? By realizing God's love for you. When you realize that, you're free! You don't have to prove anything to anyone. You don't have to compare, or impress anyone. John writes 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 have 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 ...”* It's lifelong. It's that journey we began with each other, that we were never meant to walk alone.

The fourth enemy of community is resentment. This is big. Job 5:2 says this *“To worry yourself to death with resentment is a foolish, senseless thing to do.”* Because we're all imperfect, you're going to hurt other people and other people are going to hurt you in life – intentionally or unintentionally. That's a fact. What's more important is what you *do* with that hurt. Are you going to allow it to make you better, or bitter?

When you're resentful two things happen – you don't think logically and you start self-defeating behavior. The Bible says in Psalms 73 *“Since my heart was embittered [that means resentful] and my soul deeply wounded, I was stupid and could not understand.”* In other words, I didn't think straight and I started in doing self-defeating behavior. God says I don't want you to do that.

One of the purposes of a small group is to help you think straight when you've been hurt. When you start to get bitter and you don't think straight you need people who are not bitter around you to help you think it through and keep you from doing dumb things. That's what the Bible says. *“Look after each other ... Watch out that no bitterness [that's resentment] takes root among you, [that's in your group] for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives.”* So when somebody's hurting in a group, you gather around them and you help them, and you keep them from getting bitter against it. The reality is the people that we want to love the most we often end up resenting the most – like parents or somebody else. Those we want to love the most we end up resenting the most.

What's the antidote? **The antidote to resentment is forgiveness.** Forgiveness builds relationships just like resentment tears it down. If you're going to have a long-term marriage that lasts your entire life you're going to need massive doses of forgiveness, Colossians 3:13 *“You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”*

Why should I forgive other people? There are three reasons. First, resentment doesn't work. It only makes you miserable. So holding on to a grudge you're only hurting yourself with your anger. So you forgive for your own benefit. Second, you forgive because you have been forgiven by God. And third, you're going to need more forgiveness in the future so you better offer it to others now. We pray the Lord's prayer,

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who’ve sinned against us.” So “God, I want You to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else.” (whew...)

That’s why you need Jesus Christ. You and I can’t do it on our own. Human love runs out. You need God’s supernatural love in you. Let me explain what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not making excuses for that person who hurt you. They hurt you and it was real. Forgiveness is not minimizing the hurt. It hurt! Forgiveness is not justifying it not saying it’s no big deal. It was a big deal. Forgiveness is not saying it wasn’t wrong. It was wrong. 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.

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. Every time you hold on to that grudge you are perpetuating your own pain. Forgiveness is the only way to get on with your life. They don’t deserve it. Did you deserve to be forgiven by God? No. But God did it anyway. Out of His grace and kindness.

God brought you here this morning because He’s got some good news for you. The Lord says, *“Forget what happened before and do not 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.”* (Is. 43:18-19)

You may have had some relational disasters in your life. Welcome to the human race. 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. It starts with opening up your life to Jesus Christ and letting Him fill you with His love on a moment by moment basis.

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 lined up and all the other ones will fall into place. Allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord and manager, the boss of your life. Let Him fill you with His love and you’ll start to have great relationships with other people.

Pray this prayer in your heart: Dear Jesus, You’ve seen every relationship I’ve ever had – the good, the bad, and the ugly. 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. As much as I understand I ask You Jesus to come into my life and live through me and put Your love through me. I want that fresh start that You offer. In Your name I pray. Amen.