

LESSON 8: STAYING ON THE RIGHT PATH

BIG IDEA

Choosing our relationships carefully is vital to staying healthy. God doesn't just call us to nurture and initiate meaningful relationships. His Word also tells us to stay away from harmful relationships and to restore our broken ones.

Developing strong relationships takes work, but we can do it. Be intentional with the people in your sphere of influence. Take the time to cultivate Godly relationships with your church family, friends, and coworkers. Growing the right relationships is important because "we" is always better than "me."

DISCUSSION

- Talk about a time when you walked through a difficult season alone. How do you believe the support of a Small Group would have impacted how you experienced that season?
- Who do you turn to for advice? How healthy and helpful have those relationships been so far?
- Can you think of any relationships in your life that feel negative, draining, or unhealthy? What are ways you could start to step away from those relationships?
- What new relationships could you pursue? Are there some existing relationships you would benefit from strengthening?

TEACHING

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)

We go to God for forgiveness and people for healing, to experience the freedom the Gospel offers us. The question is, who in your life would you go to in order to confess areas in which you are struggling or have failed? Proximity isn't enough to create the safety we need to be vulnerable. You probably wouldn't plan to go to an acquaintance, a co-worker, or someone who lives down the hall.

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'" -C.S. Lewis

The Bible teaches that God uses healthy relationships to deliver his gospel-ordained freedom to us, so isolation and loneliness should significantly concern us. Our relationships have a powerful potential in our lives. That is the reason they are difficult and complicated and often have spiritual warfare around them. Our enemy knows what a true friend delivers to our lives.

If you are going to receive all God has planned for you, it will take the conviction that you cannot do it alone. You will need to reject the idea of self-sufficient, self-made people. You will need to embrace that God created us with limitations. You were not made to live life by yourself. God said of Adam, in the perfect garden that existed by his design and without sin: *"It is not good that man should be alone"* (Gen 2:18). Admitting you need friendship isn't weakness; it is wisdom.

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Prov 27:17)

Choose Your Relationships Carefully.

As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man. (Prov 27:19)

The Bible teaches that our futures are intertwined with the friendships we cultivate. You are the sum total of the people closest to you. James suggests that our freedom is tied to our friendships. Therefore, choosing our relationships wisely is of incredible importance.

1. Nurture my important relationships.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet 4:7-8)

Begin by taking a few moments and writing out the important relationships in your life.

- Your spouse
- Your children
- Your parents and siblings
- Your friends
- Your mentors
- Your co-workers and neighbors

Honestly evaluate the health of each relationship. What is going well? What could be strengthened? Where are there gaps? Practice being intentional about investing in each relationship you listed. Remember, the grass doesn't grow on the other side of the fence; it grows where it is watered. Pause and pray for the relationships you listed now.

2. Restore my broken relationships.

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Col 3:13)

We know the enemy is hell-bent on destroying relationships. He knows how powerful they are. Maybe you have a damaged relationship in your life. You can be certain God wants you to do everything possible to see that relationship restored. Ask God to search your heart and let you know if there is anyone you need to forgive. Unforgiveness is a barrier to spiritual growth. Holding a grudge feels good and just, but the only person we are damaging is ourselves.

Go back to your list of important relationships. Write out the names of people you need to forgive and why. Pray for God to allow you to see them the way He sees them. Set them free today and experience the freedom God has for you.

Restoration requires the participation of two people, and for some, that's not possible right now. Understand forgiveness and restoration are not the same thing. Forgiveness is between you and God; restoration is between you and the other person. Forgiveness is the first step toward restoration and is commanded by God. If restoration is going to be possible, someone has to take the first step of forgiveness.

3. Sever any harmful relationships.

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Prov 13:20)

When you get serious about following God, you will have to break some relationships. We have all had the experience of needing to spend less time with someone who isn't in the same place and is actually slowing our growth or health. Sometimes we feel guilty admitting things have changed, but remember, if the enemy can't stop you he will try to distract and discourage you. He will use anything you let him use, including relationships.

Go back to the list of your important relationships. Look at the names and create a grid, asking two questions: Is this relationship enjoyable? Second, is this relationship growing and helping both parties grow? You will have relationships that aren't growing but are enjoyable, are growing but aren't enjoyable, aren't growing or enjoyable, and hopefully, are growing and are enjoyable. Looking at your relationships that need to be a priority, what changes do you need to make? Where do you need to invest? Where do you need some distance?

4. Initiate some meaningful relationships.

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:25)

Make relationships a priority, a discipline, a lifestyle. Spend time thinking about where you need mentorship, and then begin to pray and watch the people God has already put in your life. It is important to understand it is unlikely someone will walk up to you and ask to be your friend or mentor. You have to take responsibility and initiate. Be a good friend. Be humble and ask someone for help. Ask God to help you with this; God is a God of divine connections, and He is faithful.

As a quick tip, mentorship isn't often an overarching relationship. Instead of thinking about "who" could mentor you, ask "where" you need mentoring. Then, think about the people you know who are most effective in that specific arena. Start small, and be honoring of the person's time and energy. Be humble and be prepared when they give you

time. In some instances, the relationship will be short-lived but helpful. But sometimes, the relationship will grow and extend to broader and deeper places. Manage your expectations, and be grateful for the investment people make in you.

Develop the Right Relationships

1. Develop my relationship with my church.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (Eph 2:19)

As important as corporate worship is, your relationship with the church is bigger than your attendance at weekend services. You need friends, not just fellow congregants. You need people you trust, not just people you sit beside in a service. Worshiping together is wonderful, but take the next step and make yourself available for a relationship beyond the four walls of the church house.

2. Develop my relationship with Godly friends.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (Acts 2:44)

Commit to small groups. This is a big one. Better still, start a small group. Find something you enjoy doing and find some people you enjoy doing it with. Many of you would say, "Not me! I'm not ready to lead!" If we only do what we are comfortable doing, then we don't really need God. Waiting until we are ready is normally too late.

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. (Ecc 11:4)

Quick tip: the fastest way to grow is to do something you don't feel ready to do. The return in your investment will be worth your time.

3. Develop my relationship with a team.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. (Ecc 4:9)

Where and with whom are you serving? If you are not a part of the Graceway Dream Team, make plans to go to Growth Track and get signed up. Talk to your mentor about attending Growth Track with you and walking you through each step. Dive in and find a place to serve. We need you, and you need us.

Relationships are the most important focus here on earth. Make relationships a priority—you are doing that by being in this small group. Commit to it as a lifestyle and you'll grow like never before.

We is always better than me.

DIG DEEPER

- What is something in the past or present that is holding you back from finding healing in your relationships? Identify a few ways to improve the quality of your relationships.
- Identify some people you admire. How could you start a relationship with them?
- Is there a relationship you could put more effort into? How?
- Tell the group about a time when you initiated a meaningful relationship.

NEXT STEPS

- Ask God to show you any relationships in your life that need to be restored. Take a small step towards reconciliation. Starting may be as simple as making a phone call.
- Ask the other members of your group how you can pray for them. Write down their prayer requests and pray for them throughout the week. You might even text them with an encouraging word sometime during the week.

RESOURCES

Forgiveness by Tim Keller

Emotionally Healthy Relationships by Pete Scazarro

Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoffer

Boundaries by Henry Cloud

Relationships: A Mess Worth Making by Timothy S. Lane

Made for Friendship by Drew Hunter

MEMORY VERSE

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Prov 27:17)

DAILY SCRIPTURE AND JOURNALING

Day One

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet 4:7-8)

Journal: Describe "fervent charity." What would need to change in order for that to be true of you?

Day Two

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Col 3:13)

Journal: What is the difference between forbearing and forgiving? Can you list people in both categories?

Day Three

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Prov 13:20)

Journal: What is the key to becoming wise? Are your companions helping or hurting?

Day Four

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:25)

Journal: Why is fellowship with believers so critical?

Day Five

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. (Eccl 4:9)

Journal: If you lack strength, borrow it. Where could you use some help in your life?