

Just Checking In #97 Five Essentials for Lasting Relationships

Nov 15, 2010

Psalm 39:12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord... for I am a 'pilgrim' with
You..."

"You might make a convert in a conversation,

but you'll never make a disciple without a relationship!"

Check out www.bbcpa.org and www.ronberrus.abwe.org for messages & the booklet on "The Five Essentials"

If you want the booklet in a pdf or word file format, just email me and I'll send it to you. Let me know which.

I just preached this series at Baptist Bible College of PA and you can listen to the audio on their website, too.

We were created for connectedness.

The Genesis account details creation week with a repetitive exclamation of "it was good." But on the sixth day we hear the first discordant note... those strange and glaring words "it is not good." What could possibly be "not good" in a perfect world? Disconnectedness from human relationships is not good! God Himself declared that we were created for a relationship with Him and also with others of our own kind. However, sin destroyed the intimacy and glory of a perfect relationship both vertical and horizontal – with the divine and with fellow humans. Therefore we are born into this world as misfits! We are disconnected from our Creator and from one another. Sinners by nature and by choice, we continually wreak havoc in our relationships. But God has given us a message (the gospel of relational reconciliation), a model (Himself), a manual (His word), and a motivation (His Spirit) to build relationships that reflect God's relationship with us.

Through 38 years of Bible study and 35 years of ministry I have discovered **five absolute essentials** for building lasting relationships. *Each of these is a reflection of our God and commanded in scripture.* I hope they encourage you as you reflect on and apply them continually in your own relationships.

Essential #1 Respect

Defines the Existence of a Relationship

Demonstrated by Listening actively

1Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

I listen to understand. I seek truth in a loving manner.

Exodus 20:3, 20:12 Matthew 5:47 I Peter 1:23, 2:17-18, 3:7-9,

3:15 Ephesians 4:1-2

God listens! Respect is absolutely foundational to any lasting relationship. *Respect is demonstrated in every culture by actively listening to others.* I am to treat everyone with respect by listening to and responding to them appropriately. The number one most repeated command in the Bible is the command to “listen!” Trust must be earned but respect is to be given freely. (1 Peter 2:17; 3:7; 3:15) Respect for people does not require agreement or cooperation. Respect does require a self-controlled, gracious, patient, thoughtful response to all men. God allows us to make choices and then allows us to live with the consequences. God offers help and grace, but does not prevent us from making choices. I am not responsible for others’ choices but I am fully responsible for my own. I am not responsible for what others think, say, do, or do not do, unless by complicity or deception.

Essential #2 Honesty

Defines the Depth

Demonstrated by Speaking truthfully

Ephesians 4:15 “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ”

I speak to be understood. I speak truth in a loving manner.

Exodus 20:16 Matthew 5:37 Ephesians 4:25

God is truth. He does not deceive. He tells us what we need to know. He communicates. He keeps His promises and His warnings. God requires that we speak truth, telling people what they need to know. We are to communicate our desires and plans while letting others make their own choices and live with the consequences. I am fully responsible for my own words, choices and actions. I am responsible to be honest and consistent in responding to the choices of others. I must not lie, gossip, be critical in spirit, a flirt, a flatterer or a hypocrite.

Essential #3 Commitment

Defines the Length

Demonstrated by Staying and Serving

Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you; But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?”

I stay and I serve. Loving loyalty with a servant’s heart.

Exodus 20:14 Mark 10:45

God keeps His covenants and promises to His people. God makes provision for restoring His rebellious, disobedient people. God keeps calling, working, and waiting. God doesn’t give up. Even in judgment He shows mercy and a commitment to His word and His people. He doesn’t prevent His people from making their own choices. He doesn’t shield them from every wrong choice or the consequences of those choices. But He always makes a way for restoring His people. God keeps His promises even when His people don’t keep theirs.

Essential #4 Acceptance

Defines the Enjoyment

Demonstrated by Embracing

Romans 15:7 “Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us, to the glory of God.”

I accept you are you are, without condoning your sin or expecting perfection. We are all people in process. None of us have arrived. We belong to each other.

Exodus 20:17 Romans 15:7 I Cor 12

Acceptance is the essence of “best-friendness”.... Someone who knows you really well and likes you anyway! Loyalty, acceptance and forbearance are often absent and unsung virtues in God’s church. God accepts me as I am, with no intention of letting me stay that way! He is at work to make me like His Son. I am required to accept others as they are and to patiently labor to love them. God has intentionally made us different. The early church was besieged with differences: Jew-Gentile; Rich-Poor; Slave-Free; Roman Citizen–Non Citizen. He has made us His people different by design... in different colors, sexes, ages, personalities, abilities, preferences, interests, and gifts. There are some people I may naturally connect with due to personality, background, history or other factors, but I must not avoid others due to their uniqueness from me. Mature people differentiate between personality and character, between preferences and

absolutes, and between forms and functions. I need you... your strengths and your weaknesses, your virtues and your faults. I will never grow in patience unless I am frustrated, I will never grow in longsuffering if I do not suffer, I will never grow in grace if I never experience others failures. Our tendency is to label and divide into “us and them.” God says, in His body, it is only “us!” 1 Cor 12:12-27 warns us of three common, fleshly responses that demonstrate a lack of acceptance: “I’m not like you... I don’t belong to you...I don’t need you!”

Essential # 5 Forgiveness

Defines the Growth

Demonstrated by Praying for those who offend

Ephesians 4:32 “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

Because I am freely and fully forgiven, I freely and fully forgive you.

Exodus 20:13 Matthew 5:23-24,44; 6:12-15; 18:15-35 Luke 17:1-10

Ephesians 4:32 Job 42:10

God is gracious and forgiving. God has been offended far more, far greater, and far deeper than I have. God’s forgiveness costs more than mine.

Christ’s willingness to forgive me of my sins cost him the agony of divine wrath on the cross. Forgiving others is both possible and required because I am fully forgiven. Forgiveness is not optional. Forgiveness with reconciliation is two sided and therefore not always possible. Forgiveness with resolution is one sided, done in my heart, and is therefore always both possible and necessary. Forgiveness is a decision lived out in practice, not a feeling or loss of memory.

For further study:

Word study on honor and respect. Word study on “listen” (Shema in Hebrew – found 1,017 times!!!). Survey of Proverbs on listening, respect, honor and lack thereof. Survey of 1 & 2 Samuel (Shema-u-el = God listens, listens to God) where the theme of listening is foremost. (The priest who won’t listen and the one who will.... The king who won’t listen and the king who will.)

Think about it:

The most important element in building any relationship is listening carefully and well. It is also the most difficult. We must discipline our minds to listen actively. Old saying: “I never learned a thing while speaking.” “Let every man be quick to listen, slow to speak...” James 1:19

“A wise man listens...” Prov 12:15

Self Check:

1. How much time am I spending listening to the words of God...and how intently?
2. Who do I tend to shut off and stop listening to?
3. Am I frequently guilty wandering mentally and not concentrating when others are speaking?
4. Do I listen more for an opportunity to get my two-cents in, or to really understand others?
5. Would others who know me well say I am a good listener?
6. Do I ask good questions to help me understand others, or do I tend to assume things a lot?

"Lord, make me a good listener. I confess it is easy for me to let me mind wander... whether when reading your Word or listening to the words of others. Lord, You listen to me.... how amazing but true! Transform me into a really good listener in the coming days. Give me the grace to show everyone that they matter, by treating them with respect demonstrated by listening. And especially fill me with Your fear, that I listen well to Thee. In the name of Christ, who always listened to and followed Your voice, Amen."

Remember, you are very special to us and we pray for you.

Living with leaving in view.... Jn 9:4 Ron & Val

Seeing The Invisible, embracing The Unapproachable, declaring The
Inexplicable, changed by The Immutable,
running after The Irresistible with inexhaustible joy in our inexpressible
sorrows, spending our time on eternity,
owning nothing yet possessing everything that matters and lasts.
We are Pilgrims in Paradox.
Welcome to THE JOURNEY.