

Pastor Roy's sermon from February 12, 2017

Children: Rules. Are rules good? What would happen if there were no rules at school or at home?

What is more important, doing good, or investing in relationships? I'm not sure one is better than the other, but which is key for you? It might depend on your personality and gifting. Some folks are drawn to relationships, others avoid them. Here is another question, "Is it possible to have a good influence except in relationship to the people and world around us?" We are all engaged in relationships in which we can care, love, and listen.

Valentine's Day is coming up. A day set aside for Love. A day set aside for relationships. Valentine's Day is a celebration of living in relationship with another. It can be a lonely day for many. But the essence of the day is the reminder that love is not mainly about me. It is about relationship.

I'm guessing that we tend to relate to people and invest ourselves in ways that are comfortable for **us**. But to be in relationship is to figure out what works for the **other** person and then to reorient ourselves to that person—their interests, their concerns, their griefs and their joys. To live in relationship is to be reoriented away from ourselves and toward another. In biblical terms, it is to repent. To turn. To follow in a new way. Away from ourselves and toward another. Yes, John the Baptist and Jesus speak of repentance in terms of God, but we can speak of it in terms of all of our relationships too. The apostle Paul defined repentance by the way we relate to those around us, especially to those who share our faith.

So to live in relationship is to make decisions based on the needs and desires of another person, or a group of people. That's what Moses calls Israel to do in Deuteronomy. Choose life. Choose to be oriented to the voice of God calling Israel to care for and relate to their neighbor with justice and kindness. The faith of Israel was a reminder that choosing life was not about personal fulfillment, but about living in community. Jesus calls his disciples to the same in the sermon on the mount.

I don't think Jesus is not calling us to be super good people here, he is calling us to tend our relationships with great care. For example, to be angry with another and to tend and nurture that rage, is very destructive. To speak forth that rage as insult is even more destructive. If we have truly offended another, we are called to seek restoration of that relationship. Because that person is important.

Adultery and unfaithfulness in thought and action are destructive to committed relationships. Divorce signifies neither a new opportunity nor a new freedom but the loss of commitment, a truly broken relationship. Divorce is not a commodity to be sought, but to be avoided if at all possible. I don't believe Jesus is focusing on the evils of divorce but on the value of sustaining healthy relationships. A healthy relationship is gift to be guarded, a treasure to be held, but a healthy relationship does require two willing parties. In some cases health cannot be found in a broken relationship and one's personal wellbeing must be chosen over the avoidance of a divorce or the end of an otherwise valuable relationship. Jesus' words invite us to the joy and discipline of healthy relationships.

Finally, Jesus calls us to honesty rather than elaborate lies. In the end, if we can say yes, we must say yes, if we cannot, we must say no. Simplicity is a discipline.

Relationships demand effort, honesty, integrity, and a whole lot of mercy. Because none of us is perfect, each of us needs lots of help.

Jesus is not calling us to perfect relationships, but healthy ones. He is calling us to give honor to the relationships in which we find ourselves. To be committed. To avoid cheap shortcuts. To truly love, to value the gift and abundance of relationships which surround us. God help us to invest in our relationships. Amen.