Title: “Developing Healthy Relationships”
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Smythe Street Cathedral
Introduction

Healthy relationships are really important.

Back in Genesis 2 we find the account of God and the first man, Adam. In the beginning we are told the world was perfect, without sin, and Adam and God were in a relationship that is as perfect as it could be, but God looked around, saw the man alone and said…

**Genesis 2:18 (NIV)**
The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

The story goes on to talk of the creation of Eve. It is a powerful statement about marriage and how we belong together, but it carries implications beyond that as well. Even for those of you who are single today (I was single for 29 years, so I know this well), **It is not good to be alone.**

*God’s statement in Genesis 2 reveals that not only do we need God in our life, but we are designed in such a way that we need others if we are to experience the life that is good.*

We all recognized the value of relationships. Loneliness is often cited as one of the contributing factors to depression.

Being alone sets us up to be more venerable to succumb to life’s problems.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)**
Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: *If one falls down, his friend can help him up.*

*But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. *But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be outnumbered, two can defend themselves.*

*A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

In life there come events, accidents and battles that if we are left to ourselves, we cannot handle.

If we are alone and we fall, no one is near enough to us to know what happened, what happens to us?
While we understand that relationships are good, we find it challenging... 

- Time – where do we begin?
- People are weird
  - Bad relationship experiences in the past
    - Needy people
    - Weird people
    - Hurting people
    - Complicated people
- We understand that others are important, but it’s not only easy (look at family, you love them but it is hard sometimes)

We want to be a healthy relationships...
None of us want an encore presentation of unhealthy relationships from our past, but often we don’t know where to start.

Where Today’s Message Began...
In a men’s group reading a study on prayer from, Devotional Classics, Edited by Richard Foster & James Bryan Smith.

We were reading a selection from a book on prayer written by George Buttrick.

“Prayer is friendship with God. Friendship is not formal, but is not formless: it has its cultivation, its behavior, its obligations, even its disciplines; and the casual mind kills it.”

I began to think about prayer in a new light, but this quote actually got me to think about relationships, about friendships, about the kinds of relationships we would like to have family of believers.

GOOD NEWS: The Bible Says something about this
This morning we’re going to look at Philippians 2. In this chapter, Paul is writing to a group of Christians talking to them about how to live out their faith together. In this chapter, Paul spells out one of the great secrets to
creating healthy relationships. We’re going to take a look at a few verses where he sets the stage for this church to be all it should be relationally.

He starts by talking about what we’ve received from God, which interestingly parallels some of the actions & attitudes we are to have with each other…

**Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV)**

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

**If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ...**

If we are going to have healthy relationships, we need to encourage one another. Jesus walks into our lives, when we are part of his body, we receive encouragement.

We are to be encouragers.

**Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)**

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

**ILLUSTRATION: Mr. Taylor my gym teacher doing weight training. Thinking I couldn’t do one more rep, he simply put his finger under my hand and I did three more. Encouragement is powerful.**

Do you know encouragers?
if any comfort from his love...

God is the perfect model of how to develop healthy relationships. Have you received comfort from receiving God’s love?

We are called to give what God has given to us.

1 John 4:11-12 (NIV)
Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

if any fellowship with the Spirit...

Fellowship – it is the same word used to talk about the being part of a community.

Acts 2:42 (NIV)
They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

As a church it is essential that we be dedicated to fellowship, the sharing of life together. To be accessible to each other.

if any tenderness and compassion...

Compassion talks of a heart that is moved. God gives us compassion.

Exodus 34:5-6 (NIV)
Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness…

That tenderness is to be expressed between us in our relationships with one another and to others.

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)
Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
When I hear of these traits in relationships, I dream of being a part of a church filled with relationships like this. Isn’t the kind of place, the types of relationships we long for?

Pause: Community Groups

If we are going to have these kinds of relationships as a church family, where we can experience:

- Encouragement
- Comfort
- Meaningful fellowship
- Tenderness, compassion, forgiveness

Sundays are not enough.

This is why we have Community Groups. [Lorne Testimony]

What are Community Groups?

- Groups of 8 to 10 people that meet regularly, outside of the church (a home or somewhere else) for prayer, Bible Study and fellowship.

- We’re asking all group members to commit to 8 sessions together. Some will meet weekly, bi-weekly and some 3 out of 4 weeks. There will be a chance to share a meal together, learn a bit about each other’s stories, prayer, Bible study and discussion.
  
  - After 8 weeks there is a chance to decide what’s next. I believe many groups will decide to keep going for a few more months, maybe even for the year. A few might realize it wasn’t working out, that’s okay too, maybe it wasn’t the right group.

- But would you consider trying it out? An 8 session experiment in community?

- Launching Sunday, September 25th at 6:00 PM
  
  - We are taking the unusual step of using our Sunday Evening Service time because our Community Groups team figured
that would be the time when the most people possible could come out to find a group.

**The Key to Healthy Relationships...**

Paul continues by telling them to pursue unity in spirit and in purpose. We are to put in the effort to work and live together focused on the goals of extending Christ’s kingdom.

Then Paul shares the key to healthy relationships in verses 3-5.

Philippians 2:3-5 (NIV)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus

Look to the interests of others… first.

This bites us hard. I don’t know about you, but when I started thinking about finding encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness, compassion, forgiveness, I can stop and think, that’s what I need. I need people like that in my life, but the point is we are to be those things first.

As I stop and consider the people I love being around, those who naturally seem to find relationships, friendship, joy and a life I would want to model, I think of the people who “look to the interests of others.”

Those are the people you hear stories about: Pastor Wayne’s mentor, Jon & Judy, Laurie Mersereau

The inverse is true. The people who seem saddest, who yearn for community & relationship and cannot seem to find it are those who seem to ‘look to their own interests’ and don’t consider others. (I won’t mention names here)
When I mentioned the second category, how many of you thought of someone else?

The truth be told, there is some of that selfishness in all of us.

We are creatures who love comfort, but developing authentic community in our church, becoming a welcoming and loving place calls us to step out to take a risk, to not just think of ourselves, to look to others.

**What could our future be?**

Imagine, a place where everybody really knows and is known by somebody. Imagine that place being our church. That is what we can become, but it will take a healthy risk.

**“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus…”**

Jesus becomes our model. Philippians 2 tells of how Jesus put his desires on the back burner, he humbled himself, becoming a servant, even dying on the cross.

What did he do, he chose to endure the cross so all of us could have the opportunity to receive forgiveness, life and full relationship with God.

I want to love like Jesus, and I want others to know Jesus’ love.

Maybe you are here today, and you hear of all the great things God offers but you’ve never decided to follow Jesus. As we pray, you could receive him this morning.

**Prayer**