

Come Alive In Your Relationships

1. **Four Key** Relationships

- **God**

- *Jeremiah 3:19*

- **Family**

- *1 Timothy 5:8; Psalm 68:6*

- **Church Family**

- *Hebrews 10:25*

- **The World**

- *Matthew 28:18-20*

2. **Keys to Healthy** Relationships

- **Be Patient**

- *1 Corinthians 13:4-5; Ephesians 4:2*

- **Don't Be Angry**

- *Ephesians 4:26-27; Hebrews 12:14-15*

- **Watch Your Words**

- *Proverbs 18:21; Ephesians 4:29*

- **Choose to Forgive**

- *Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:13*

3. **Keys to Deal with Offenses**

- **Talk to God**

- *1 Peter 5:7*

- **Talk to the Person** (if you need to)

- *Matthew 18:15*

- **Do NOT Talk to Others**

- *Proverbs 16:28, 20:19, 26:20*

T – Is it *true*?

H – Is it *helpful*?

I – Is it *inspiring*?

N – Is it *necessary*?

K – Is it *kind*?

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4/8/18

Come Alive In Your Relationships¹

We had a great time of praise and a powerful time of response last Sunday, didn't we? So many people coming forward to say, "I want the resurrection life of God to come alive in me through Christ!" It was a great affirmation of the reality of the power of the resurrection, and I trust that many of you, like me, have experienced it in your life in specific ways over the last week.

That is the key – that the resurrection makes a difference in our lives everyday. So we are going to spend the next four Sundays looking at how we can make sure that we know how to apply the resurrection to our lives. Today we begin with "Come Alive In Your Relationships."

Last week we used an interactive system as a part of our time in God's Word, and I'd like to do that again today if you don't mind.

So if you would, go ahead and get out your smart phone or your iPad or tablet, and go to the website – menti.com.

Menti.com

code: 59 35 43

church internet access:

wvc

password: lovelearnlive

If you need to connect to the internet, then there is our Wi-Fi service and the password.

When you get there, I'll make the question available in a moment, but I want you to answer a question – and you can be honest: "How many close friends do you have?" I'm not going to define for you what a close friend is – I'll let you decide that – but it's more than a casual acquaintance or an ordinary friend. However you decide it, I would assume it is someone with whom you have a great deal of trust, okay?

So you will see categories that you can choose – only one answer, but choose away.

¹ Main resources: Michael O'Neill, *Games of Life: Aggravation*; Chris Jordan, *Key to Healthy Relationships*; Haydn Shaw, *Generational IQ* (Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2015); Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992); Marshall Shelly, *Well-Intentioned Dragons* (Word Books, Waco, TX, 1985); Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1986)

Relationships can be tricky, can't they? Sometimes they can be really difficult, especially if it's with someone who is kind of prickly. I'm thinking of a guy named John, who had a neighbor named Frank who was a real pain and very insensitive, so John wrote Frank a letter. It said:

"Dear Frank: We've been neighbors for six tumultuous years. When you borrowed my tiller, you returned it in pieces. When I was sick, you blasted rap music. And when your dog went to the bathroom all over my lawn, you laughed. I could go on, but I'm certainly not one to hold grudges. So I am writing this letter to tell you that your house is on fire. Cordially, John"

Hopefully you won't deal with relationships that way! Instead we want to know how we can come alive in our relationships – especially when they get difficult.

To start with, it's important that we identify the priority...

1. ***Four Key Relationships***

...we have in our lives as resurrection people. Every person who is a Christian will have these four key relationships. If you are not a Christian, you probably have these relationships as well, at least to a certain extent. But they will not be as rich, meaningful, and transformative as they are for people who are experiencing resurrection life, because eternal life that God gives is a God-quality life that intends for our relationships to be valuable and life giving.

The first key relationship is with – ***God***

You and I were created to be in relationship with God. He longs to be in relationship with you; that is why he sent his Son to die on the cross and then raised him from the dead – so that you and He could be in relationship.

The longings of God's heart are revealed when he was speaking to his people Israel through the prophet Jeremiah. The people of Israel had once again walked away from God, but what he told them is the same thing he says to you:

"I planned what I'd say if you returned to me: 'Good! I'll bring you back into the family. I'll give you choice land, land that the godless nations would die for.' And I imagined that you would say, 'Dear father!' and would never again go off and leave me." (Jeremiah 3:19, tm)

God longs for this relationship with you – you are his priority relationship, and he can be yours.

If you have this relationship, and it is healthy and growing, then it becomes the foundation and the touchstone for the other three priority relationships being healthy. This relationship can be yours through accepting what Jesus Christ has done for you through the cross and resurrection. From this relationship with God you will have the confidence you need, the patience you need, the love you need – on and on, that will equip you to be your best in the other relationships.

The next of the four key relationships is – ***Family***

I know the obvious ones we are talking about is immediate family – your husband or wife, your children, or your parents. We are going to talk about family in more detail next week, but these relationships are to be a priority. If you read the Old Testament, you will see that the whole nation of Israel is built family by family. The New Testament also puts these relationships in priority by saying:

“If any do not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever.”
(1 Timothy 5:8, gnt)

So our immediate family is to be a priority.

But I also know that this might get a little tricky for you if you don't have any immediate family – you are single, you don't have children, or perhaps your parents have passed away and you have no siblings. But don't be discouraged – the Bible says to you:

“God sets the lonely in families.” (Psalm 68:6, niv)

God will give you family, even if you are alone, and that is the next set of priority relationships that you are to have - ***Church*** family.

The church is another priority relationship that all resurrection people need to have. When the Bible talks about church, it's used two different ways: one is used to mean the Universal Church – capital “C”, which refers to every believer in Jesus who has ever lived in history and around the world. The other way that the word “church” is used when it identifies the local church – a group of believers that meet together in a specific geographical location. The number of times the Universal Church is referenced in the New Testament is – twice. Every other time, which is well over a hundred times – it is used to refer to the local church.

There is a growing sentiment these days, especially among younger generations, to reject the local church as an institution or an organization, and to identify more with the Universal Church. I understand some of that – the institution and organized church has had many public failures and wrongful positions over the last few decades. But I like what Haydn Shaw says. He is an expert in generational research and an author. He says this: “While the church has taken many shapes through the centuries, it has always been a group of people in some community like Ephesus or Sardis or Rio de Janeiro or Lockport, Illinois. While the Kingdom – the church universal – lives out God's grand story, unrestrained by our human failings or limitations, the only way you and I can experience the universal church is in an 'earthly' church. While the church universal is like a mighty army always marching onward, the one I attend is full of humans, and they are flawed, fickle, and frustrating. Just like me...”² The place where we learn to lean into and live out our faith is in the *local* church. We can't do this Christianity thing alone and we were not meant to; we were created for community. That means that local church relationships are an important priority.

² Shaw, 97

And that's why the Bible says:

"Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord's coming is getting closer."
(Hebrews 10:25, cev)

The Bible tells believers to prioritize the relationships of the local church gathering together regularly. That's why we are always encouraging all of us to participate in a small group on a regular basis. We can come to church on Sunday mornings and worship together and never grow closer to the people around us. But in a small group, we learn to love each other. More than that, we learn to LIKE each other! And we help each other grow. If the bulk of your spiritual growth is dependent on Sunday mornings, you are dwarfed; you are like a baby considered "failure to thrive." You aren't keeping up in your growth.

Finally, before we move on, there is a fourth key relationship that you must have, and that is with – **the World**.

When I say the world, I'm not referring to the evil, power hungry, suppressive structures of this world. I'm not talking about the sinful core of societal culture. I am referring to those people who are outside the church who do not have resurrection life and relationship with God through faith in Jesus. If you are a Christian living in resurrection life, then you must have relationships with people who are not.

There is a tendency for people, once they've become a Christian, to gradually develop more and more Christian friends and less and less of their non-Christian friends. It's only natural – we tend to develop relationships with those with whom we have things in common, and having Christ in common is a BIG one. But Jesus tells us:

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20, tm)

How can we obey this command if we isolate ourselves from the world around us? Our number one task on this earth as believers in Jesus is to build relationships with seeking people who have not experienced resurrection life so that we might introduce them to Jesus. That's the way it ought to be day in, day out, in the lives of Christ-followers in the Universal Church and in the local church, all across the globe – friendships getting formed right and left that eventually lead to something spiritually transforming.

Do you recognize those relationships and why they are important?

So let's try something. Go back to your smart phones and let's try another poll: I'd like you to rank your relationships in these four areas on a scale of one to ten – one being non-existent or not very good, ten means that these are your strongest

relationships. And again, please be honest; your answers are completely anonymous.

There are challenges in each of these four areas of relationship, aren't there? Especially when it comes to the other three that deal with people. God is always the same – we can count on his unchanging love and unchanging character. But how do we deal with people in our family and church and world in order to make sure those relationships are healthy? Let's look at some...

2. ***Keys to Healthy Relationships***

Managing relationships is not an easy thing; if you have two people together in a room, then you have at least three different opinions on any given topic!

So learning how to navigate these relationships requires some important skills that God has provided in his Word and which you can accomplish through his resurrection power. So let me give you some incredibly practical and very powerful keys to healthy relationships.

First, when it comes to any relationship, remember that you must – **Be *Patient***

You have a new life that allows you to love others first and foremost, no matter what they may or may not do. So, the Bible says:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, niv)

Be patient with those whom you are in relationship with; relax! Nothing they do is going to be the end of the world. Don't get all worked up. Just understand that there's a good chance they are going to do something to disappoint or even hurt you. Sometimes they might mean it, and sometimes it's not intentional. Still...

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (Ephesians 4:2, niv)

And if they do offend you or hurt you, - ***Don't be Angry***

Anger is an emotional response, and we are mistaken to think that it is something that we can't control – especially as people who live in resurrection power. The person you are in relationship may not be able to control their anger, but you can! It's not that you won't get angry – you will. But *it's what you do with it*, and how you express it, that makes the difference. That's why the Bible says:

“In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4:26-27, niv)

Anger is a dangerous emotion that can damage and destroy relationships. When you are hurt or offended by someone and you hang on to your anger, it can turn to bitterness inside you and even lead to depression. Bitterness is to the soul what cancer is to the body; it consumes you. And psychologists agree that depression has

been called “anger turned inward.” So again, the Bible, which is the Word of God for the resurrection life, says this:

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
(Hebrews 12:14-15, niv)

How are you doing so far? Do you see how practical and yet powerful God’s Word is in helping you Come Alive in your relationships? We want to be a church that is filled with healthy relationships, so I am really praying that we can ask God and cooperate with him to put these into practice in our lives.

If you do find yourself losing patience and feeling angry, be sure to - **Watch Your Words**

I like what comedian Steve Martin said about this: “Before you criticize a man, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you do criticize him, you’ll be a mile away and have his shoes.”

Maybe it would be better if we simply watched our words. Words have incredible power. Remember that in the very beginning of creation in the book of Genesis, when God created everything, in every instance – light, land, animals, people, what did God do? He *spoke*. As people who have come alive in our relationships, our words have the power to build up or tear down. Proverbs says:

“The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.” (Proverbs 18:21, nlt)

The Bible has a lot to say about our words. Maybe even more important than the debate about gun control ought to be a discussion about word control! Maybe if people would speak kindness to others, we wouldn’t have people who feel victimized and powerless and think their only option is violence. Did you hear what West Valley Junior High did in response to the Parkland shooting? You know that in that shooting, 17 people were killed at Stoneman Douglas High School. So West Valley Junior High students pledged to commit 17 acts of kindness in their honor. Who knows but by doing this they have changed the course of a future killer.

We are further instructed and empowered by God’s Word in this way:

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.” (Ephesians 4:29, nlt)

Watch your words! Let them be constructive and not destructive, and you will be on your way to healthy relationships.

The next is really, really important, and perhaps the hardest: if someone says or does destructive and hurtful or offensive things to you, - **Choose to Forgive**

The alternative to anger and the antidote to pain is forgiveness. That’s why the Bible tells us to:

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”
(Ephesians 4:31-32, nlt)

We have come alive into resurrection life because of what God did for us through his one and only Son Jesus Christ. And Jesus did all of that so we could be forgiven. God’s forgiveness of us is no small thing and no simple task. It is at the center of how we are able to have a relationship with our loving God. It is also going to be at the center of our being resurrection people, living out God-quality life in this world. It will be at the center of our relationships:

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13, niv)

We have been forgiven, so resurrection people are people who love so much that they choose to forgive.

Since we have been talking about how we can be hurt or offended, let me share quickly...

3. Keys to ***Deal with Offenses***

We’ve already said that it’s inevitable in any relationship that we are going to be hurt or offended; sometimes people do it on purpose, and sometimes it is accidental. Either way, it is bound to happen. In order to be able to be patient and not lash out in anger and to choose constructive words and to even forgive, let me give you some counsel on what you can do that will help you in these things. We want to come alive in resurrection power in order to have healthy relationships, so it makes sense that first, whenever we are hurt or offended, to - ***Talk to God*** about it first in prayer. Pray that God would give you wisdom. Pour out your feelings to him. Express your anger. Ask him to heal your hurt and brokenness. Remember that you can:

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7, niv)

Then, if you feel you really need to - ***Talk to the Person***

If you feel like it would be most beneficial to work it out with the person for *their sake as much as yours*, then I would encourage you to do it – especially if you feel that they have sinned against you. If they have not sinned, then determine if it will help or further hurt the relationship. Either way, if you do decide to talk to the person, know it will be hard, and you might risk rejection again, so be careful and be wise about it. Don’t go into it with guns blazing or you’ll get shot at too. Go into it meekly and gently, seeking the best for the other person. Jesus tells us how to do that:

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” (Matthew 18:15, niv)

If the person doesn't listen, Jesus gives more instructions about next steps that you can take if you still feel you need to – you can read it in the rest of Matthew 18. Remember though that the purpose of talking to them is reconciliation of the relationship. That's your motivation – not to tell them that they hurt you or to get them back or be passive aggressive toward them. If you don't have a genuine desire to reconcile, don't do it. If it is impossible to reconcile, don't do it. And by all means, whatever you do, - **Do NOT *Talk to Others*** about it. If the person you are speaking to is not part of the problem and not part of the solution, you have no business talking to them about the other person. To do that is to gossip, and the Bible plainly calls gossip sin. Let me just give you a small fraction of what the Bible says about that:

“A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends.”
(Proverbs 16:28)

“A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around with someone who talks too much.” (Proverbs 20:19)

“Fire goes out for lack of fuel, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops.”
(Proverbs 26:20)

God clearly commands us – do not gossip and do not hang around with a gossip. And Remember: if someone will gossip TO you, they will also gossip ABOUT you. Make a commitment to never say something negative about someone again.

So here is the final key that might help you if you are tempted to talk to the person who has hurt you or to someone else about the person who has hurt you: you need to stop and T.H.I.N.K. Prayerfully talk to God and ask yourself these questions:

T – Is it *true*?

H – Is it *helpful*?

I – Is it *inspiring*?

N – Is it *necessary*?

K – Is it *Kind*?

If you can do these things, you will find yourself growing healthy in those four key relationships – with God, with family, with people in your church family and people who are outside of the church.

You might wonder why I chose to address the issues that I did when talking about healthy relationships. After all, I could have talked about love, about kindness, about trust, and about all kinds of other positive qualities. Why did I talk about the need to be patient and the problem of anger and word usage and forgiveness in offenses?

You might recall that recently I was in Kansas City. I was at meetings there with a few denominational leaders and some other men and women pastors. We were selected from the Nazarene Churches in North America to meet and discuss issues facing the local church today. We did this last year, too. Last year we spoke of

issues like racism, homosexuality, pluralism, and other issues like that. This year we realized that we are no longer even able to *talk* about those issues; people are so angry that they literally hate you if they even *think* you have a different opinion. We see it in the news, we see it on social media, and now we are even seeing it play out in our church relationships and in our personal relationships.

According to a study sponsored by USA Today five years ago, the share of Americans who reported feeling angry or irritable had surged from 50 percent just two years earlier to 60 percent in 2013. A Harvard Medical School study from 2012 found that nearly two-thirds of American teens admitted to having anger attacks involving the destruction of property, threats of violence, or engaging in violence.

One New York news website wrote, "Some are describing this as 'America's anger epidemic'." It cites unemployment, the economy, and for those who have work, overworking, as contributing factors.

But we're not only angry. We're also *afraid* ... of one another. "For four decades," reports the Associated Press, "a gut-level ingredient of democracy—trust in the other fellow—has been quietly draining away. These days, only one-third of Americans say most people can be trusted. Half felt that way in 1972." The AP article concluded, "Forty years later, a record high of nearly two-thirds say 'you can't be too careful' in dealing with people."³ Friends, that was *five years ago*. It has only gotten worse since then.

If we are going to come alive in our relationships in resurrection power, in ways that will transform our society, we have to deal with relationships. But we can't force anyone to start acting in healthy ways in their relationships. You can't legislate this. All we can do is determine to live that way *ourselves* in *our* relationships with family, the church, and the world, by the power of God. But if we do, we will find that the world around us is being transformed, coming alive in resurrection power, one relationship at a time, one life at a time.

³ Eric Metaxas, "*Angry America*," Break Point Commentaries (12-10-13)