RELATIONSHIPS

Chapter 1

What They Are Not

One of the things for this New Year that the Lord has laid upon my heart is the subject THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS.  I told my daughters that they will succeed in life if they learn how to build and maintain relationships.  Relationships are something that we all face in our families, churches, jobs, professions, etc.  Learning to build and maintain relationships will spell success or disaster in everything we do, and especially when it comes to the work of God.

When we talk about relationships we need to define what we are talking about.  Often there has been a lot of confusion and misunderstanding when it comes to relationships. Often people think that to have a right relationship we must all think alike.  Isn’t this what the Scripture teaches that if we are in Christ we will have the same mind? But, this is not the same as everyone thinking alike. I do not believe that this is what that Scripture teaches.

God has made each of us unique.  There are no two humans alike.  We are all different. And because we are different we all have different ways through our senses of sorting through information that comes to us throughout the day. I look at my wife and two daughters.  They receive the same information that I receive, but they respond differently.  When my two daughters were teen-agers they really thought differently.  But, we all had a right relationship with one another.

Although we do not think alike we are to think together.  In fact, to have a good relationship with someone means we are thinking together, or sharing our thoughts.  We see the importance of this coming out with the different nationalities; that to have right relationships with people of other cultures we need to think together even though we think differently.

Having right relationships does not mean that there will be no differences of opinions on issues.  It is only natural that if we think differently that there will be differences of opinions.

What I have discovered over the years is that we actually need our different thinking on issues.  This is the beauty of the Body of Christ and why we need one another with our different aspects of thinking.  There is no one person who has all the truth, who has all the wisdom, etc. When we come to together to think together we can begin to see a bigger picture of who Christ really is through His Body.

Some people think that to have right relationships means that there will be no more conflicts.  How untrue this is. It is true that in a maturing marriage over the years conflicts will become less and less.  We will see later on that conflicts are not always bad, but often even necessary for spiritual growth. Having conflicts is not necessarily a bad sign as far as relationships are concerned.  In any relationship maturity comes by not avoiding conflicts, but rather by working them out and through.

One last thing that we need to understand about relationships is the mistake in thinking that everything should be perfect in the relationship.  I find people who think that if something does not feel right to them then there must be something wrong with the relationship. There are two things I would like to mention about this.  First, when it comes to developing relationships as well as maintaining them it will take discipline, working at it every day. The time spent working on good relationships is time well spent.  Secondly, we need to understand that we are all sinners in need of God’s grace.

I remember one brother mentioning that when things came up between him and his wife he remembered that he married a sinner and so did his wife.  We want to push towards perfection, but at the same time we need to keep in mind that we will not achieve perfection on this side of eternity.

Chapter 2

Why Relationships are Important - Part 1

There are two reasons why relationships are important when it comes to the Body of Christ.  The first one I would like to discuss in this chapter and the second one I will discuss in the next.

Relationships are important because of the Body of Christ.  Consider some of these verses:

1 Corinthians 12:12 “The body is a unit, though it is made up of  many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”

Ephesians 4:14-16 “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

John 17:22-23 (Jesus says) “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.”

If I understand Scripture properly, the Body of Christ functions according to how the interpersonal relationships are working.  If our relationships are not right with each other then the Body of Christ is not right. Broken relationships hinder growth more than anything else.

If one member is in disagreement with another so that they separate from one another, the Body hurts.  The analogy that Paul uses is that of a human body.  If one member of the body (let it be an arm, leg, foot, toe, finger, etc.) is hurting or not functioning the way it should, it hurts the entire body.

According to John 17:23, Jesus said, “I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

The word “complete” brings out the idea of perfecting one another.  In other words, I need my brother to help me to become complete in Christ. This is not something that I can do on my own.

Every day you and I allow evil things to come into our hearts. God brings this out through what the prophet Jeremiah spoke: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (17:9) I need my brother to help me see what is deceiving me so that it does not begin to produce any actions of evil.

 For many years after I was saved I thought that I could personally push for maturity on my own since it seemed that the Body in Christ, in general, was not interested. It wasn't until I got more involved with the O.M. ships' ministry that I began to change my thinking and recognize that I needed my brothers and sisters in Christ in order to grow up in the Lord. If I am not growing then the Body of Christ is not growing. If the Body of Christ is not growing then I am not growing as a part of the Body.  Realizing this truth made me work harder using my spiritual gifts which have been given from God – for the common good of the Body of Christ; that it matures in Christ.

Chapter 3

Why Relationships are Important - Part 2

Three very important promises are given in Matthew 18. Any promise of God is important, but when I look at these three in particular I realize that these are things that we need to pay careful attention to.

Matthew 18:18-20 “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.  Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.  For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

The whole 18th chapter of Matthew is talking about relationships.  If we are going to live in a community (and the church is a community) then this is the chapter that we should pay careful attention to.

Matthew 18:15-17 talks about the need for reconciliation.  Verses 21 to the end of the chapter are talking about perpetual forgiveness. However, what is interesting is that between verse 17 and verse 21 we have verses 18-20.  The question that comes to my mind is: Why did the Holy Spirit insert these three verses between reconciliation and forgiveness in the context of our relationships with one another in this community that we call the church?

These three verses are ‘conditional’ promises. The condition is whether reconciliation as well as forgiveness is taking place so that we might claim these powerful promises.

The first promise in verse 18 is talking about the power to bind and release. What are we to bind and release?  It would seem to me that we are to bind the enemy and release souls.  As Isaiah said: "Set the captives free."  Isn't this the task of the church?

When I think of the world that we live in, the task of the church is very clear. With the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist world we realize that many are locked in their religious prisons.  God said in Matthew 28 that all authority is given to us – to GO!  We have that authority, but it is conditional upon our relationships working right. Satan knows this and he will do everything in his power to stop us using broken relationships in the way.

The second promise is talking about collective prayer being answered. We all intellectually know that God answers prayer.  The question comes: Why don't we have more prayer in our own individual lives as well as more collective prayer? I think one of the reasons for this is that prayer does not seem real to us. We do not pray because we do not see real answers to prayers, and the reason we do not see answers to prayer is because our relationships are not right.

Peter brings this out regarding the husband and wife relationship. 1 Peter 3:7 “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

What can hinder our prayers as husbands?  Not being in the right relationship with our wives.  Often Jesus said that when we stand praying and have something against our brother that we should first get it right with our brother, so that our Father in heaven might forgive us and our prayers not be hindered.  Scripture says that if I hide sin in my life the Lord will not hear me. Broken relationships keep the Lord from hearing us.

Lastly He brings out the promise of the Presence of the Lord.  When we are in right agreement with one another we find that God is there in our midst. The Psalmist tells us that in the Presence of the Lord there is joy and Nehemiah says the joy of the Lord is our strength.

I often find that people are emotionally run down and unable to rise up to do what should be done because they do not have any strength.  When I talk with them it often comes out that there is a broken relationship.  We all have experienced this and we all have felt its tremendous draining effect upon us. However, we also have sensed the joy when a relationship was worked out.  This is the Presence of the Lord.

We often hear that we should live in His Presence, but what does this mean practically in everyday life?  I believe it means that my conscience is pure/clean before God and any other person - so that there are no broken relationships that were my responsibility to correct in God’s eyes.

Relationships are very important.

Chapter 4

Resolving Conflicts

Acts 15:36-41 “Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Whenever you bring two human beings together there will be the difference of opinions or a clash between two wills.  This is a good definition of a conflict.

Here in this passage of Scripture in Acts we see a conflict that came up between two godly men - the apostle Paul and Barnabas.  What caused this conflict?  It was a difference in opinion between these two men over another man by the name of John Mark.

One question that we might ask is: in this conflict between Paul and Barnabas who was right and who was wrong?  There are probably many arguments we could bring to buttress up the sides of both men to prove their side of the argument.  I believe that they were both right and in one sense they were both wrong.

A conflict will be a normal thing.  Whenever you bring two people together there will always be the difference of opinions, ideas, etc. A conflict, however, must be worked out and if it is, it can result in greater spiritual growth.  We will see this as we continue on with our weekly letters.

Take for example Paul and Barnabas.  Paul’s temperament is choleric.  He is out going and one to take over.  Barnabas, is a good example of a phlegmatic temperament.  He would be willing to sit back, take it easy and let the choleric take over.  The question is: is that what God wants?  I don’t believe so.

Barnabas was the one to find and disciple Paul.  In the beginning it was Barnabas and Saul, but later it changes to Paul and Barnabas.  It seems that Paul takes the lead and Barnabas with the gifts that God has given him takes a back seat.

Barnabas has much to offer, but he seems unwilling to exert himself.

A conflict over John Mark takes place between Barnabas and Paul and they part company.  Barnabas takes John Mark and goes in another direction.  Although Scripture is silent about Barnabas from then on and concentrates more on Paul we know that God used Barnabas with John Mark, because Paul later on says: ‘send me John Mark because he is profitable for the ministry.’

In Hebrews 10:24 (“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”) I think it is interesting that the word used for spurring one another on is the same word used in Acts 15 where it says that Paul and Barnabas had a ‘sharp’ disagreement.  Here we see the word ‘spur’ and ‘sharp’ are the same Greek word.

What this shows me is that conflicts are not necessarily bad.  However, they do need to be worked out and when they are it can result in spiritual growth.

Chapter 5

Conflicts Can Be Growth Oriented

If we do not deal with a conflict in the right way it will become a problem.  A problem in this sense is an unresolved conflict and it can be quite damaging.

Satan is always looking for an advantage through unresolved conflicts. 1 Peter 5:8 brings this out: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” In the Body of Christ Satan knows that this is where he can do the most damage.

In Scripture we are told that we should not be unaware of his schemes.

We can understand Satan’s schemes when we consider what he is called.

Revelations 12:8-10 “The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.’”

In these verses we learn two things about Satan that we should be aware of:

1) Satan is known as the deceiver

2) Satan is known as the accuser

When it comes to relationships we need to keep these two things in mind. We can see how he gains an advantage. Whenever a conflict comes up in a relationship Satan is there to deceive. One way that he does this is to get us to think that the conflict is not serious, or, that we should be spiritual and just rise above it, or that we should just pray about it.  All of this sounds good, but God tells us to go to our brother. (Matthew 5:23 and 18:15-17)

The last thing that Satan wants in any broken relationship is for us to be talking to one another. He will try to keep us separate and this is what he does through deceit. When we are not talking with the other person about the offense or conflict, like Jesus said, then Satan comes and begins to whisper in our ears accusations about the other person. Then we begin to see that everything the other person does - is against us. We then find that negative things about that person begin to build up in our mind.

What may have seemed like a little mole hill has now become a mountain, or perhaps a volcano, and eventually it erupts so that the damage is great; perhaps it even seems beyond repair. Satan has done his work. We now have a real problem.

However, when a conflict arises and we work it out we can find that it results in spiritual growth. For example, when we work out the conflict we find that it can result in a deeper understanding of the person that we had the conflict with. Things that we did not know about him/her before, things like his/her background or fears, give us the understanding we need of what they are going through. When we begin to see this we not only have compassion for them, but also a deeper realization of the grace of God.

In Hebrews 12:15 we are told: “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”  If we do not work out the conflict then a root of bitterness will spring up.  Bitterness to our spirit is like poison to our body; it kills.

However, in working through the conflict for the sake of the relationship we experience the grace and power of Ephesians 2:14-16 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Another very positive result of all of this is that we begin to develop a meaningful dialogue with one another. So often our dialogue is very shallow and self-centered, but the working out of a conflict tends to deepen our conversation with one another and our love for one another.

All of this of course, brings spiritual growth. We need to keep in mind that we grow by working through these daily conflicts with people.

Chapter 6

What are the Causes for Conflicts?

It is important for us to understand some of the causes for conflicts.  Just like we do not grow in a vacuum, conflicts do not happen without some other things in play.  We need to see what these are so that we might deal with them.

Perhaps one of the greatest causes for conflicts is pride.  Proverbs 13:10 says: “Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.”  I know when there is any disunity that at the heart of the matter is pride.  We might try to cover it up with excuses, but the Bible says it is simply pride.

What I mean about pride is thinking that 'my way is better.' Whenever there is comparison pride is there. Think through any relationship where there has been a conflict and see if pride was not at the heart of the matter.

Isn’t this what James is talking about in James 4:1-3, 6-8 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

The solution for pride is found in Ephesians 5:21, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” and in 1 Peter 5:5, “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

Another cause of conflicts is self-centeredness, another part of pride.

Isaiah 53:6 says “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”  Between these two “alls” we have the gospel in a nutshell.  But what it brings out is that we are self-centered people.

So often we are like little children wanting our own way and if we do not get it we will throw our tantrums (have our conflicts).

Scripture has much to say about this.  We need to meditate on I Corinthians 13, this great chapter on love, where it says that love does not seek its own.  Or, perhaps we need to go to Philippians 2 where we have the example of Christ: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Another cause of conflict can be found in Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”  This is a verse that few seem to understand and accept; just how deceitful our heart really is.

So often in a conflict people have their mind (judgment) already made up; the person cannot change because he/she will not change the mind that is set. What this does is it breaks down communication and when communication with one another goes down, so does the relationship.

Pride is destructive to relationships.

Chapter 7

What To Do About Conflicts

Now that we know that conflicts are inevitable the question comes up: What do we do about them?  How do we handle them in such a way that they might be growth oriented and not disintegrate into a problem?

If I look back over my ministry, there seem to be four ways that conflicts have been handled:

1.         Unwillingness to face it.  Often we have been like an ostrich with our head in the sand unwilling to face the reality of a developing conflict. “Conflict?  What conflict?” seems to be the response of some.  However, this is one way of confronting a conflict and sadly this is the way some handle it.

2.         Dealing with side issues instead of the real issue. In English we have a saying: “Beating around the bush.”  Basically, what it means is that we skirt around the real issue and never get to the heart of the matter.  Sadly this is the way conflicts often have been dealt with.  Instead of getting to the heart of the matt

er we deal with things that might seem important, but in reality all it is doing is putting a band-aid on something that might need an operation.

3.         Trying to ignore it.  This is a little different than the first one where we are unwilling to face a conflict.  This is where we know there is a conflict, but we believe that if we ignore it somehow it will go away; somehow it will take care of itself. All we have to do is wait and eventually it will work itself out. This is wishful thinking.  It never happens because we have an implacable enemy who is making sure that it never will go away.

4.         Working it out scripturally.  This is the only way that we can deal with a conflict.  Working it out scripturally means that we will move towards true reconciliation.  We will be looking at this later on. Reconciliation does not necessarily mean that the conflict is resolved as far as the issues are concerned.

When we work on reconciliation we are dealing with personal relationships.  We may not be able to resolve the issues completely because there will always be a difference of opinions that stem from our background, experience, culture, language, etc.

We need to keep in mind that in any relationship (marriage, etc.) the goal is not for us to think alike, but to think together. The goal in a relationship is unity not uniformity.

We need the difference of opinions. There are no two people alike. However, when there are differences that grow into conflicts, we need reconciliation.

Chapter 8

Reconciliation – Part 1

Matthew 5:23-25 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."

Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.  If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

We live in a world where man is not only separated from God, but also separated from his fellowman.  We see the reality of this when we look back over the 20th century.  There never has been such a century of bloodshed.

Even now when we look forward to the 21st century it does not look any better.  We see disputes among the nations, marriages that are falling apart, children estranged from their parents and churches breaking apart because of disunity.

We who are in Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

The Gospel is the power of God to bring reconciliation between a Holy God and a sinful man.  What a powerful message this is in the Muslim world where two billion people are trying to find peace with God.

Satan knows that this is a powerful message that we have to offer to the world and the world is waiting to hear.  This is why broken relationships and disharmony among God's people is so evil.  It takes away the message that we have.

We cannot separate the message from the messenger.  Broken relationships among us distort the message.  How can we talk about reconciliation when there are broken relationships among us?

The definition of reconciliation: to harmonize, to restore to union and friendship after estrangement.

Matthew 18:19-20 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."

It is interesting that the word for 'agree' is the word 'sumphoneo:' to be harmonious.

It brings out the idea of a symphony with different musical instruments all in tune with one another bringing out tremendous sound of harmony and beauty.

Take a family, church or community of people who come from different backgrounds and cultures living and working together in harmony.  What a testimony! What a powerful message this sends to a world that is divided.

Back in the early 70’s the OM Logos ship was in the Sudan.  The Minister of Education came to open the book exhibition.  He was a Muslim.  When he looked around and saw all of the different nationalities on board the ship speaking different languages and working without salary, he said that we were like a small United Nations, except, he said, we had unity.  The second comment was a question.  How could we live together like we did?  He knew it was not the money, but he could not understand how it was possible.  This was how we brought Jesus Christ in; how Christ has broken down the barriers and brought us together.

It is hard for a Muslim or any person no matter what religion he might have (or no religion at all) to argue with this type of testimony.  Jesus knew this and He prayed in John 17 that His people might be one as He and the Father are one, so that the world might believe.  The opposite of this is true as well. If we are not one - then the world will not believe.

Chapter 9

Reconciliation - Part 2

Humility

Matthew 7:1-5 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

When it comes to reconciliation one of the first steps we are to take is to start with ourselves. The above passage illustrates the truth that it is easy to see what is wrong with others, but far more difficult to see what is wrong with us.  We are to make sure that the 'log' is out of our own eye before we try to take the 'splinter' out of the eye of our brother/sister.

This, I believe, is a very delicate matter.  I think this is the reason why the Lord Jesus uses the illustration of the eye since the eye is one of the most sensitive parts of the human body.  So when the Lord talks about relationships and reconciliation, I believe these must be treated as delicate matters.

Ephesians 4:1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

We have unity in Christ.  It will take work and effort to maintain this unity.  Here in Ephesians Paul is giving us the type of behavior necessary to maintain unity and to bring about reconciliation.  This is what we must consider to make sure that we have the 'log' out of our own eye.

1. Humility:  The Greek word means humiliation of mind, i.e. modesty.

1 Peter 5:5 probably best brings out the idea of what Paul is trying to say here. "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’"

The   idea is to bring ourselves under.

2. Gentleness: The Greek word brings out the idea of mildness, meekness. Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Meekness does not mean weakness. Perhaps the best way to describe this is "strength under control."  It is the ability (or strength) to destroy, but held in check.  A good example of this is Moses.  He was the meekest man on the earth. When he came down from the Mountain with the Ten Commandments in his arms and saw the debauchery taking place among God's people he could have stepped aside and allowed God to destroy them, but he didn't. Strength under control.

3. Patience:  Perhaps one of the best definitions of the Greek word for patience is, "to be long-tempered."  One of the problems in relationships is anger. This is something that we will look at later.  When it comes to establishing and maintaining relationships, anger is something that will have to be dealt with.

4. Forbearance: Again the best definition for this word is, "to put up with." In the New King James Version of the Bible it says: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4) We see that 'forbearance' is one of the attributes of God.

In closing I would like to say that the prayer for myself and for those that read this is that we might experience daily revival.  We need to see afresh how important relationships are and yet often how difficult they are to maintain.  Still maintain them we must.  This is our message of reconciliation and we cannot allow anything to interfere with that message.

Chapter 10

Reconciliation - Part 3

 Must Risk Confrontation

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."

One of the greatest difficulties in the area of leadership is the inability to confront when necessary.  Often the leader gets pushed into a corner where he must confront and then it is done in a wrong manner and does irreparable damage.

Many people fear confrontation. There are probably a number of reasons for this. It might be that we are afraid of making judgmental statements, or we have a feeling of inadequacy ourselves (who are we to judge?), or we ourselves have things to cover up.  In other words, we do not have a clear conscience and so we feel hypocritical.  Whatever the reasons might be, confrontation is something that we try to get out of.

Yet, when I read a verse like this in Matthew the one thing that comes out to me is that God wants a constant movement towards one another.  "If I see my brother... go!" "If I know that my brother has something against me... go!" We need to have honest communication with one another.

Often we go, but not to the one that we should go to, but we go to a third party and there we do our sharing. It becomes more of a time of gossip (God forbid that we call it “gossip!”) than a time of honest sharing and praying.

Some people ask the question: When should I go to another person and confront for any grievance or something that I think is wrong? I have found that before I confront another person I should first bring the matter before the Lord.  I have learned that when I have brought certain things before the Lord that soon they were erased from my mind.  I took this to mean that I was not to confront the other person with it.  However, if after I have brought it to the Lord and it still remains in my mind, often this is something that the Lord wants me to bring out to the person involved.

Sometimes when a person is confronted with something, they deny it. What do we do then? We take it as far as we can and then we leave it with the Lord.  When I was the director of the Doulos (one of Operation Mobilization’s ships) I had a situation where a brother was confronted with a particular thing, but he denied it.  I left it at that. A few months later I was visiting his country and through some rather strange happenings I found out that this brother had lied.  Later I confronted him with this.  At that time there was real confession and repentance.

When I look back over this incident I see a spiritual truth coming out about how to deal with confrontation.  In 1 John 1:7 we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."  When I originally confronted this brother I was walking in the light that I had.  When he denied it I had no more light at that time.  However later on, through circumstances arranged by the Holy Spirit, I received more light on this brother's situation.  I now needed to walk in the new light that I had received and to confront that brother with it.  The result was brokenness, confession, repentance, fellowship and through restoration this brother is now being used by the Lord.  I often thought what would have happened with this brother if these steps were not taken.

In Matthew 5:23-24 the idea is that confrontation is to take place quite quickly, but first we need to pray and make sure that we have the log out of our own eye. Then sometimes we allow too much time to go by so that when we think about confronting, it seems that we are bringing something out from the past and so we would like to by-pass the incident.

When confronting we need to make sure that we go with humility.  This is the idea that comes out in Matthew 18 where it says that we should “go.”  The Greek word brings out the idea “to lead oneself under, to withdraw or retire as sinking out of sight.”  In other words, we are to go with humility.  It always helps to realize that we have the same capacity for sin as the brother we are confronting.

My prayer for myself and for those who read this is - that we might be the kind of confronters that God wants.

Chapter 11

Reconciliation – Part 4

Forgiveness Must Come In

Ephesians 4:30-32 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

When we consider reconciliation we must keep in mind that there must be forgiveness. When there are conflicts what often happens is that bitterness comes in.  The writer of the Hebrews explicitly tells us that we should not fail the grace of God by allowing a root of bitterness to spring up.  The reason why is because bitterness to the soul or spirit is like poison to the body.  It will kill us.  How many churches have been split, ministries stopped and people of God hindered because of *bitterness of spirit*?

The only antidote to this poison is forgiveness.  Yet, if we are honest, the one thing that we do not want to do is to forgive.  Somehow we sense a kind of morbid pleasure and satisfaction by having bitterness towards the one who offended us, we do not feel like forgiving that person.  How often our emotions have played a major role in our Christian life in what we do or not do.

One thing that we must understand at the outset is that forgiveness is not based upon how we feel, but on being obedient to the Lord.  We are commanded to forgive.

In Matthew 18: 21-35 Jesus talks about perpetual forgiveness.  Peter asked the question: "How many times must I forgive my brother, seven times?"

Jesus responded and said, "Seventy times seven." In other words, we need to have perpetual forgiveness, and yet so often we do not feel like forgiving.

In Luke 17 Jesus brings some additional teaching to Matthew 18 with something similar to contemplate. He told the disciples that if a brother comes seven times in a day and asks your forgiveness – to forgive him. I am sure that we would not feel like doing so, question it, as we would probably wonder how genuine his asking for forgiveness really is. However, that is not for us to judge. We are simply to forgive, and entrust it all to God.

It was at this point the disciples said: “Lord increase our faith.”  It would seem that the disciples thought that what they needed was more faith, but that wasn’t it at all.  What they needed was obedience. They were to forgive. It is through obedience that our faith grows.

Then Jesus went on to tell a parable about a servant who was out in the field all day working, sweating, thirsty and tired.  When he came back home what did the master do?  He told the servant that before he eats, drinks and takes it easy that he was to fulfill his duties to the master.  Does his master thank him?  No, because we are told that this was the servant's duty.  This is what he should be doing.

However, the point is this: I am sure that the servant **did not feel** like taking care of his master after having worked in the field all day.  He was tired and hungry and he wanted to rest.  This is what he felt, but what he had to do was another thing.  He had to prepare for the master. He had to obey!

It is in this context that Jesus is talking about forgiving our brother.  But, we say, we do not feel like it. Forgiveness is not based on how we feel, but upon obedience to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.  It is an act of our will.

When we obey the Lord, whether we feel like it or not, we will find that ‘in time’ our feelings will catch up to the Lord.  The problem in the Christian life is that so much of what we do, or do not do, is based upon how we feel.  We cannot allow feelings to lead us; instead we must be led by our ‘will’ to obey the Lord. Genuine forgiveness means several things.

It means that I will not raise the issue again; whatever the issue or the thing is that I am to forgive. We may say we forgive, but we are constantly raising the same issues again and again.

When we forgive it means that we will not tell a third party. Yet, often this is what takes place.  We say that we forgive, but then we are constantly repeating it to a third party.

When we forgive it also means that we will not dwell on the issue.  This is where the battle is; it’s in our minds.  When the issues do come back into our minds then we need to deal with them quickly and severely, to make them obedient to the words of Christ. After a time we will find that they do not come back.

The Lord is our example. When it is hard to forgive, just take a look at the cross and see how much the Lord forgave us.  When He forgives - He does not bring it back up to us, but removes it as far as the East is from the West.  He forgets about it.  Let us do the same.  Life is too short for anything less.  May God work in us all.

Chapter 12

Reconciliation – Part 5

What About Memories, Scars, Etc.?

In dealing with relationships one thing that comes up is: What about the memories, hurts, scars (emotional as well as physical)?  Because of broken relationships a lot of people do get abused and emotionally scarred.

Often these people have heard or have been counseled that when we forgive, we forget. So when they cannot forget (what has been done to them) they begin to question their forgiveness as well as their own spiritual life.

I would venture to say that there are some things that we will never forget because the memories, scars and hurts are too deep, but this does not mean that the person has not forgiven. But we need to think about what do we do with the memories, hurts and scars?

There are several things that I would like to address.

We need to keep in mind that we cannot immediately forget and that some wounds we will never forget because they are too deep.  Keeping this in mind we should not feel guilty if we find ourselves not forgetting.  Often this is where Satan whispers in our ears that we have not really forgiven because we still remember and we find ourselves reliving the incident again in our mind.

Because we relive these things over in our mind we find that this is where the real battle takes place.  We allow the offense to come into our mind and we find ourselves replaying the ordeal over and over. To help us in this area we should not brood over the offense. This is where the renewing of our mind comes in and we begin to saturate ourselves with the Word of God.  Remember that “we cannot keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from building a nest on our heads.”  So it is with these thoughts as well.  We might find them constantly coming to us, but we do not need to allow them to stay; we do not need to brood over them.

To help keep from brooding over hurts we should not raise the issue again.  Yes, we have forgiven, but we have not so easily forgotten because the hurt is so very deep, therefore we must decide as an act of our will NOT to raise the issue again.

To not raise the issue again also means that we do not indiscriminately share it with others.  But, it might be necessary to go to someone trustworthy and discriminately share, not only to get it off your chest, but for praying with someone about as well. Remember: Satan is the one who is trying to defeat us in this area with clever schemes, which I will be sharing about later on in this series on relationships.

One positive step that we can take is to learn to praise the Lord.  On this side of eternity we will not understand everything, but we know that He does all things well and we can lift up our hearts to Him in praise and adoration.  Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:8 that we will often be “perplexed, but not in despair.”

We can thank Him for what He has done in our own lives, that even through this experience we have learned a new level of love.  God is love and He manufactures nothing else.

I said in a previous chapter that when a broken relationship is handled correctly it can result in spiritual growth.  The same thing applies here.  God can take something that is ugly and make something beautiful out of it.  God does all things well.  Amen?

Chapter 13

Fellowship in Depth - Part 1

1 John 1:5-7 “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

In regards to relationships so far, we have talked about what relationships are and what they are not; we have talked about conflicts and why we have conflicts as well as how to resolve them, and reconciliation.

In developing as well as maintaining relationships a very important part is **fellowship in depth**.  So much of our fellowship is in what I call a superficial level.  We might talk about the weather, the situation in the world, etc., but never go deeper than that.

What I mean by **fellowship in depth** is when we can get beyond the superficialities into some of the things that we are faced with, some of the problems and hurts that we really have.

Let me explain by way of an illustration.  Many years ago my wife and I were leading a team for the summer months with Operation Mobilization in Spain.  On that small team we had about nine different nationalities.

One of the things that we wanted to do was to have a fellowship among ourselves that would bring us into a deeper relationship with one another as well as help meet needs.

In the mornings we would gather for our group devotions before the day’s activities.  After meeting together for several days our love for one another began to grow and we started putting a little more pressure on the group to share a little deeper than usual, to have more **depth in our fellowship**.

On the team was one particular young lady who was very out-going, bubbly and enthusiastic. All of her sharing was superficial and not getting down into some of the real needs in her life.

One day I had to pick up the mail (this is before the internet). For people who are away from home letters are very important and something they look forward to receiving.  When I picked up the post I saw that this particular young lady did not have any letters and I knew that it would hit her hard.

When I got back to the place where we were staying I gave the letters to another brother to hand out.  All the team gathered with expectancy waiting for their name to be called.  This young lady was there with the rest.  When the brother handed out all of the letters and her name was not called she immediately put on her ‘mask’ and we could hear her say: “Well, praise the Lord! I did not receive any letters so I do not need to answer any.”  It was a brave front but deep inside she was hurt.

While the others were reading their letters, she, unnoticed by the team, slipped outside where she sat down and cried and cried.  My wife went out to find and comfort her.  She opened up to my wife and began to share at a deeper level about how she felt and some of the things that she had faced in her life as a child, etc.  What it all boiled down to was that she did not sense that anyone loved her.

The next morning when we all gathered together for our morning devotions she was very quiet. Some pressure was put on her to encourage her to share some of her hurt feelings with the people around her.  At first she was a little reluctant, but then she began to share.  It seemed that once started it became easier.  She shared how she felt that no one really loved her or accepted her, and that she had felt 'used' all of her life.

The team came to her, not with advice, but with love and shared how they appreciated her openness to share, and then the team was able to express their love to her.  Her openness in sharing opened the door for others to share as well. At the end she shared how when she first came to the devotions - she was carrying a heavy burden by herself, but after sharing she only had one twelfth of the burden.  I did not understand at first what she was referring to, but then realized that there were twelve of us on the team and each one of us had taken one twelfth of her burden.  Cast your cares upon Christ, says the Word of God. So, how do we do this?  It’s done through His body: the Church.

God did something unique in that team.  He not only gave us a tremendous unity, but used us in reaching the lost like never before.

When I talk about **fellowship in depth** I am talking about being able to share with at least a few people some of the deeper things in our life: our hurts, disappointments, temptations, etc. and to go beyond the shallow things that we so often talk about.

It is a shame that our churches are so structured that this type of fellowship is hardly attained.  There are many hurting people in the church but those hurts are never addressed because we have missed what real fellowship is.

To get into real fellowship is a scary thing at first and people will want to escape **deep fellowship**.  After we talk about **fellowship in depth** in the next few chapters we will be discussing *escapism*.

Might God bless you with His true fellowship.

Chapter 14

Fellowship in Depth – Part 2

Wearing a Mask

John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

I have often thought of this verse and wondered why so many of God's people are not free. They are still tied up with fears, inhibitions, unrealized dreams, etc. They are often afraid to step out and try new things; they have a lot of creative ability, but never seem to reach their full potential.  
  
There might be a number of reasons for this, but one that looms out to me is that maybe we have never discovered ourselves and one of the reasons for this is that we have learned to “wear a mask.”  
  
It was Paul Tournier who said: "The external mask, the outward reaction deceives everybody, the strong as well as the weak. All men, in fact are weak. All are weak because all are afraid, they are all afraid of being trampled underfoot. They are all afraid of their inner weaknesses being found out. They all have secret faults. They all have a bad conscience on account of certain acts which they would like to keep covered up. They are afraid of other men, of God, of life and death. What distinguishes men from each other is not their inner nature, but the way in which they react to this common distress."  
  
It is this mask that often keeps us from having a fellowship in depth and so our fellowship stays at a shallow level. And in a relationship like this we never get down to a meaningful dialogue. Instead, it will always be superficial.  
  
Romans 14:7-8 "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."  
  
One of the important aspects of fellowship in depth where we learn to take off the mask is that we begin to discover ourselves. It is by unburdening ourselves - that we discover ourselves. We never discover ourselves in solitude. It is only by ‘giving’ one's self that one ‘finds’ himself.  
  
To be open to another person is giving of one's self. When a person has done this he gains a victory. He begins to sense a tremendous sense of liberation and freedom, because by being transparent with you he/she has become transparent for him/herself.   
  
Some years ago I met a brother who had some type of skin condition. His skin would peel like if he had been out in the sun too long. It was not repulsive to others, but to this brother it was.   
   
He felt that people were repelled by this condition that he had. In order to protect himself he began to build a wall around himself. Whenever someone tried to get close to him they would hit the wall (of self-protection) and recoil back. When this happened this brother thought it was because of the way he looked and so he built a bigger wall that repelled all the more people.  
  
One day this brother took the step of taking off the mask and shared what he felt. This was a moment of truth that began the victory. The people that he was sharing with were able to share with him what they really thought about the skin condition that he had. He began to see what was really happening; that it was not the skin condition but rather it was the mask he wore that repelled people.  
  
This brother thought that he would never get married and have a family. I am glad to say that he is not only married, but he is also a pastor of a fellowship in the country that he lives in. What happened with this brother was that *he unburdened himself to discover himself*. No one else can do this for you either. You must recognize it and take that step of faith.  
  
It says in Acts 2:42 that the early believers **devoted themselves to fellowship**. This is the type of fellowship that is needed; the type of fellowship that helps to change our lives. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

Are you wearing a mask? Do you put people off that try to get close to you? Or, have you shed that heavy burden that had kept you in a lonely unfulfilled life?

Chapter 15

Fellowship in Depth – Part 3

Meet Basic Needs

Romans 5:5 "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."  
  
One of the things that I have discovered in traveling is that no matter where we come from, what culture we might have or language we speak, we all have the same basic human needs. What are they? A sense of acceptance, to love and being loved and a sense of self-worth.  
  
One psychologist brought out that there is no such thing as mental illness unless the brain has been impaired in some way. What he was saying was that when people's basic needs are not being met they begin to do some strange things that when observed by others we begin to think that they are mentally off. We may look at our children and think they are acting strange and perhaps are "not all there" because they are engaged in things like drugs, sex, alcohol, etc., but this could be that their basic human needs are not being met. We see Joe Blow (fictitious name) standing on the street corner shouting out that he is Abraham Lincoln. We tend to think that he is mentally off when in reality nobody recognizes him as Joe Blow and his basic need of acceptance is not being met, but as Abraham Lincoln it is a different case to him.  
  
We all have a need to be accepted and to belong; this is a strong human need. In our evangelism one of the issues we miss is that it is hard to get a person to leave one kingdom (kingdom of darkness) for another (kingdom of light). What locks us into our kingdom is acceptance. To move into the kingdom of light there must also be the acceptance. This is why little fellowship groups, where acceptance is being manifested, are a powerful magnet to the kingdom of light.  
  
Paul Tournier said: "Men's loneliness is linked with fear. Men fear one another, fear to be crushed in life, fear to be misunderstood." Another need is a feeling or sense of self-worth. When we realize that we are worth something to somebody it makes a big difference in our life as well as in our outlook.  
  
When there is a real fellowship taking place we begin to see that not only are others in the same boat as we are, but that we also have the ability to respond. In helping meet the needs of others we find our own needs being met as well. This is the way God has made us. We are made for fellowship. To build His church we must discover *fellowship in depth*.  
  
One of the most misunderstood words today is the word LOVE. We use this word for so many things. I love my dog, my car, ice cream, my neighbor and we might also say: "I love God." Yet, so often what we mistake for love is nothing more than wishy-washy sentimentality or personal preferences.

Love must always be accompanied by the truth. These two are inseparable. They will always go together like a hand and glove.  
  
Our text is Romans 5:5: “His love has been poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” This love from God is poured forth by the Holy Spirit, but it is through His Body that we mostly experience it. This is where true fellowship is found, as it should be. We are infinitely precious in the sight of God, therefore we all have 'self-worth.'

We see how these three very important needs are met in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been accepted in the Him, the Beloved of God. We know that He loves us because greater love has no man than to lay down His life for others, and this is what the Lord Jesus did for us.

Chapter 16

Fellowship in Depth – Part 4

Grow Spiritually

Paul Tournier in his little book SECRETS brings out three steps that a person takes to become or develop a personality. It would seem that each step is important in this development.  
  
He uses the illustration of a little girl called Sally. Sally when she begins to talk tells her mother everything - where she has been, who she talks with, etc. However, one day Sally tells her mother everything except for one thing. Sally has a secret. Paul Tournier goes on to say that Sally is now beginning to develop her own personality.  
  
What Sally does next is very crucial. She will choose someone to share  
that secret with. This is the second step in developing a personality. When Sally shares that secret, something that no one else knows, she has done something very special. The person that she shares that secret with has been picked out by Sally to become her friend.  
  
Often what happens is that this friend takes the secret and shares it with  
someone else and doing so Sally is crushed, because her confidence has been eroded by the one that she picked out to be her special friend. What often happens here is that Sally does not share anymore, which in turn hurts her, not only in her personality but spiritually as well.  
  
Paul Tournier goes on to say that there is one other step and that is to share that secret with God. One might say why share it with God since God   
knows everything anyway. The reason we share that secret with God is because we are taking the step of saying to God that we want Him to be our closest friend. He will never break our confidence.  
  
Why we need fellowship in depth is because no-one ever discovers himself in  
isolation. Paul Tournier says: "No one discovers themselves in solitude,   
by turning inward on himself and by analyzing himself. It is by giving one's self that one finds himself. To tell a secret is to give one's self. It is the most precious of gifts, the gift which *touches* the most. This friend has become himself a person by this victory over his timidity and constraint. He experiences an extraordinary feeling of liberation. The dimensions of his being are suddenly increased: he has breached the wall within which he was suffocating. By becoming transparent for you, he has become transparent for himself."

"The most powerful means of getting to know one's self is to allow ourselves to be examined by God and to listen to what He has to say to us, for He knows us better than we know ourselves."  
  
The tendency for each one of us is to go off on tangents. One of the  
things that will happen when there is genuine fellowship is that people will act as mirrors. We begin to see ourselves and our own mistaken attitudes. This is where 'corrective surgery' can come in.  
  
Paul said something very important in Romans 2:1 "You, therefore, have no   
excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."  
  
If we understood this verse I doubt that we would be so judgmental.

Do you find yourself getting irritated by what someone else does or says and you find yourself judging that person? It is possible that person is acting like a mirror and you are seeing some of your own wrong attitudes, errors etc. that the Lord wants to correct. This does not mean that we do not judge, because we must, but it does mean that we first take the log out of our own eye before trying to take out the splinter in someone else's eye.  
  
The Psalmist said in Psalms 19:12 “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults." The writer of the Hebrews says: "Throw away every weight.”

Fellowship in depth brings these to light so that they might be dealt with and that we might become all that God wants.  
  
The problem that we face today is that the format of our fellowships does  
not enable real fellowship to take place. We are like little islands in the midst of the congregation. Real community life is essential for fellowship in depth and fellowship in depth is important for spiritual growth.

Chapter 17

Fellowship in Depth – Part 5

Dying To Self

Continuing on we see that learning to share with someone else - some of our struggles, victories, etc. is a form of dying to one's self. Jesus said: “Pick up the cross and follow me.”  
  
The greatest hindrance to the Christian life is our selves. Jesus said that we must die, but this is the last thing that self wants to do. Self will do anything if only it can live fully satisfied. Self will go to the end of the world, give up its worldly goods, will sacrifice whatever it takes to live. Jesus went on to say: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."   John 12:24

In our fellowships we find many lonely people. Could it be because we have not learned how to die? We have not learned how to share?  
  
We know that on the other side of the cross there is resurrection life, but it seems that this is something that we know very little about. I mentioned in my previous letter a quote from Paul Tournier that when a person has overcome his timidity and learns to share that, "he experiences an extraordinary feeling of liberation. The dimensions of his being are suddenly increased: he has breached the wall within which he was suffocating. By becoming transparent for you, he has become transparent for himself." He is talking about something of a new life.  
  
We begin to get to know ourselves when we fellowship in depth with people that we can trust. This is crucial for finding our place in the Body of Christ. We begin to get God's perspective on how we fit in. This brings to us a sense of belonging which is crucial for us to operate properly with our spiritual gifts, etc.  
  
1 Corinthians 12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." We may have had great teaching on this verse on how we are part of the Body, how the Lord has given us all spiritual gifts, etc., but it will not be until we experience fellowship in depth that we fully understand how we actually ARE a part of the Body.  
  
One last thought that I would like to bring out is that *knowing Christ* and   
*knowing one another* go together. How can I say I know Christ when I do not know my brother in whom Christ resides? Philippians 3:10 "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."  
  
How can I say I love God and not love my brother? In other words, my love for others is a measuring rod, or thermometer, on how much I love God. 1 John 4:20 "If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."  
  
I believe that one of the reasons why the 'cell church' is becoming so   
powerful around the world is because this need for fellowship is being met.

Chapter 18

Watch Out For Escapism – Part 1 - Introduction

Ephesians 4:15-16 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."   
  
We have been looking at "fellowship in depth" and we saw how important this is for meaningful relationships with one another. However *fellowship in depth* for most people is a scary thing and one where we are tempted to try to escape. When it comes to building and having meaningful relationships we need to be very much alert about this danger of escapism.  
  
What do I mean by “escapism?” This is where we try to avoid anything   
unpleasant that the Lord brings into our path for our own spiritual   
development; to bring us into a deeper relationship with one another and with God.  
  
Most of us live in a society or culture where we can escape whenever we run across something unpleasant. We can go to another church or fellowship group, or change our location or job. Somehow we think that by leaving the unpleasantness we will be better off. But then we find similar things happening again and we realize that we still have got the same old problem. After a while we may even begin to realize that it is not somebody else, or something else that needs to be changed, but it’s me. *Escaping* only delays the process of God working in our lives to bring us to the place where He wants us.  
  
Remember when I was talking about conflicts and how to work them out that I said there are four different ways that people try to use. One of those ways was to think or believe that there were no conflicts. What most people do is run from them, by having an unwillingness to face the conflicts. To face them takes admitting and then confrontation. Most people do not want to do this. We run away and in so doing we delay and postpone what the Lord wants to do in our lives.  
  
However, God will not let us get away from it. It will take time, but He will work out the same circumstances as before and we will not grow spiritually until we learn the lesson that He wants to teach us through this experience   
(whatever that experience might be). It is why some people are 30, 40 or even 50 years old ‘in the Lord’ but spiritually they are still babies. They didn't mature using *escapism*; making their own way of escaping what they don’t want to face and deal with.  
  
When I was the director of O.M.'s ship M/V DOULOS I would often get young   
people in my office wanting to change departments. When they would come  
with their requests they made it sound very spiritual. For example, they had been praying and they felt that this was something that the Lord would have them do. However, upon closer scrutiny invariably I would find that there was a broken relationship and rather than face it and work it out, they were trying to run from it, to escape dealing with it personally.  
  
In these kinds of circumstances, when it seems that things are against us, we think that the person or the situation is the problem. No, the situation or the people that God surrounds us with are not the problem; they just highlight or expose the problem within us.  
  
We will be spending the next chapters looking into why and how *escapism* takes place. May the Lord bless and keep us true from within.

Chapter 19

Escapism – Part 2

Ephesians 4:15-16 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."   
  
In dealing with *escapism* a question does come to mind: Why do we try to avoid anything unpleasant, like a broken relationship rather than dealing with it in a real biblical way?  
  
There are probably many reasons for this. One reason might be that we do not want to suffer dealing with the unpleasantness. However, there are a  
few other reasons that I would like to highlight.  
  
One reason we try to escape is ‘guilt.’ At the core of most problems are feelings of guilt because of unrepented sin. Like Paul Tournier said: "All are weak because all are afraid, they are all afraid of being trampled underfoot. They are all afraid of their inner weaknesses being found out. They all have secret faults. They all have a bad conscience on account of certain acts which they would like to keep covered up. They are afraid of other men, of God, of life and death. What distinguishes men from one another is not their inner nature, but the way in which they react to this common distress."  
  
We begin to set up emotional barriers against facing facts and facing people and then become restless in looking for ways to escape. The truth of our guilt needs expression and this is where fellowship in depth comes in. We often find ourselves running from the cure.  
  
Another reason that we try to escape is the fear of rejection. Again Paul   
Tournier helps us to understand this fear. "All men are afraid and all  
long to be assured. The university degrees they take, the successes, the esteem they seek and cultivate by means of honorable behavior, the courage they show, the nerve with which they defend their views, their tenacity in demonstrating that they are always right, the respect they claim from those weaker than themselves, the witticisms they come out with - all of this is armor to cover up their weaknesses." Dr. Meader says: "The only things that hinder people from talking openly is the fear of being condemned."  
  
In all of this we are afraid of what people might think or see in us. What  
this does is it leads us to pretend. We pretend all is well, or we pretend  
that no problem exists or worse of all we pretend to be somebody else.  
  
Thirdly, there is a fear to face reality. In previous chapters I had mentioned that man's basic needs are to love, to be loved and a feeling of self-worth. If these needs are not being met then we will do some strange things. We see this with teen-agers around their peers doing some real weird stuff.  
  
This is a real danger that we are faced with today. Many people cannot  
take the truth, to see things as they really are, not what they think it should be or what they would like it to be, but what it really is. There is a  
real fear of having to face reality.  
  
One of our daily prayers should be asking the Lord to lead us into  
spiritual reality. To be a real person is what is needed. To be real to what is   
around us, our circumstances, the people we have daily contact with, and ourselves to be real with God.  
  
Might God lead us all in daily reality.

Chapter 20

Ways of Escape – Part 3

Psalms 55:6-7 "I said, ‘Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away  
and be at rest - I would flee far away and stay in the desert.’”  
  
We have been talking about escapism and how it relates to developing   
relationships.

When we run across something that is unpleasant like suffering, or a broken relationship, etc. - the human response is to run away. I wonder if this is what the Psalmist meant when he said that he wished he had wings of a bird that he might fly away.   
  
However, this is what we have the tendency to do: to run away. We   
need to recognize this and deal with it RIGHTLY.  I would like to mention  
some of the ways that we try to “fly away.”  
  
1. Brooding. When there is something unpleasant, one of the   
ways that we try to escape is what we call the silent treatment.   
Sometimes this is what we have with our wives. Perhaps what is needed is  
not the silent treatment, but an honest confrontation, getting things out in the open so that they might be dealt with. However, brooding is one way of escapism.

2. Excuses. What often happens with excuses is that we try to rationalize  
doing what we know we should not do. Jeremiah tells us that the heart is deceitful, and self-deceiving at that. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

3. Running away. This is total avoidance, the actual physical moving to another location. This is what we see with Jonah. He was running away from doing what the Lord wanted. Often the Lord wants confrontation, openness, etc. in the relationships, but we play the Jonah game.

4. Busyness. We try to keep our mind off the real problem, or issue, by doing other things. A person like this is often a workaholic. This doesn't mean that every workaholic is running away, but this might be the case.

5. Extra-curricular activities. Hobbies, entertainment, etc. can sometimes be a way of escape from unpleasantness.

6. Tiredness. Often you hear this being said. “I’m too tired to deal with it!” Yes, but sleep, rest and food should take care of tiredness unless it comes from relationships that are not right spiritually as well as physically. This can wear us out!

7. Alcohol and drugs are often another way of trying to escape from something unpleasant. Rather than facing it they turn to something that seems to temporarily help alleviate the pain. It can, but it will enslave us as well.

8. Bodily torture. We do not think of this as a way of escape, but it can  
be. We put our body through some type of strong discipline or torture to make up for a conscience that is bothering us.

9. Charity work. Doing something good such as giving money or support to an organization in order to ease the conscience. Doing good things for other people instead of doing what needs to be done in the relationship. 1 Corinthians 13:3 "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

10. Unreality/Fantasizing. I had mentioned before that so often mental illness is simply one that has escaped into unreality. If it is too hard to face reality, we try to escape into an unreal world, or fantasy.

11. Pretending. This goes along with number 10, but I made it separate.   
Pretense can take a number of forms. We can pretend to be someone or something else, we can pretend the unpleasantness that we do not want to face - does not exist, or will go away on its own.

12. Suicide. The taking of one’s life. This is quite extreme, but we see this happening more than ever before especially here in the West. When people have no hope, see no way out of the situation that they are in – suicide looks right - to end it once and for all. This is the ultimate escapism.   
  
These are some of the ways that we might try to escape anything we do not want to face or deal with, or that we don’t want to feel or go through. Rather than deal with it and confront it head on, we run from it. I am sure that you can probably add to the list other things that have not been mentioned here.  
  
Might God help us to face the unpleasant things in life and to learn from them, because God allows these things in our life so that we might learn and become more like Him.

Hear the words of Alan Redpath: There is nothing, no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can EVER touch me until first of all it has gone "past" God and "past" Christ, right through to me.  If it has come that far, it has come with great purpose which I may not understand at the moment.  But as I refuse to panic, as I lift my eyes up to Him and accept it as having 'come from His throne' for some great purpose of blessing to my heart, then NO sorrow will disturb me, NO trial will ever disarm me, NO circumstance will cause me to fret. For I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is; that is the *rest of victory*.

Chapter 21

Escapism Conclusion – Part 4

Romans 5:2-5 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

It is important for us to know what the Lord is doing when some unpleasant things come our way. Sometimes it is hard for us to see that the Lord has a plan for our lives and that He desires for us to be conformed into the image of His Son, in whom He is well pleased.

The Greek word for suffering is ‘thlipsis.’ It means pressure. It is a word that was used for sentencing people to death who committed certain crimes. For their crimes these criminals were laid on the floor or ground with a board across their chest. Then weights were added until they were completely crushed to death.

Some years back my family and I were in Toledo, Spain (the third oldest city in Spain) and we visited what is known as the ‘Museum of Torture’ that had on display some of the torture machines that were used during the Spanish Inquisition.  Seeing some of these devices that were used for torture made me wonder how man could be so cruel towards his fellowman.

On the wall I saw a drawing of what I described above of a man lying on the floor with weights being added onto his chest until he was crushed to death. In 2 Corinthians Paul uses this word when he says: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the **hardships** we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.” 2 Corinthians 1:8 “We are **hard pressed** on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

This is an interesting concept that Paul is getting across here. Paul said that he rejoices in this type of pressure because he knows what it is producing in him.

It is often through these hardships or pressures that God wants to produce in us His 'agape' love. This is the only love that the Lord Himself manufactures and this is what we need to see in our lives.  
  
In all the unpleasantness that He allows to come our way God's purpose is to produce in us a genuine love. In the world there is much false love masquerading as being the real thing. Real love that the Lord wants to see in us often comes through the hardships of life.  
  
It is this type of love that is the real power in the universe. When this love is manifested, this is maturity. It is not a wishy-washy kind of love, but one that always will come with truth, and receive the truth humbly. This love will walk in the light and confront the person in order to make things right with the relationship.   
  
Everything that you and I are going through or what comes our way has been allowed by God for one thing: to produce 'agape' love in us. This love does not come through study or good intentions, but through the hard knocks of life.  
  
The result of this love is unity in right relationships. Someone has said: “The kingdom of God is a kingdom of right relationships."

Chapter 22

Recognizing Anger – Part 1

Proverbs 14:17 "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated."   
Proverbs 14:29 "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly."   
Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up  
anger."  
  
In dealing with personal relationships it is important to take anger into consideration. Anger is something that needs to be recognized and strongly consider.

Anger is an emotion that is felt and is a motivating force that drives us to some kind of action. For example, I think of the organization known as MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). This organization started when some mothers lost their children because of drunk drivers. They were mad at what had happened and it motivated them to action.   
  
Anger in and of itself - is not sin. Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

When I read Scripture I see that even God is angry. Psalms 7:11 "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day." I believe that God is angry with the injustices that He sees every day and the time is coming when His righteous judgment will be poured out.  
  
We read that Jesus went into His Father's house and saw that it had become a den of robbers. What did He do? He deliberately went out and made a whip and with it He drove the money changers out. We read: John 2:17 "His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"  
  
Mansell Pattison said: "Anger (in contrast to rage) however, is a very necessary and useful reaction. Anger is appropriate as a communication of feeling in reaction to another's behavior." Some movements that have been   
used of God have started because some people were angry at what was being done. For example, MADD "Mothers Against Drunk Driving."  
  
We need to also understand that our emotional makeup is from God. Emotions that God has made us capable of, when used properly, are constructive. However, if we fail to express our emotions in harmony with biblical limitations and structures, they become destructive.  
  
What are the biblical boundaries that the Lord has given us? There are three restrictions for anger.  
  
1. When the anger is hasty. Proverbs 14:17 "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated."   Proverbs 16:32 "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city."  We see that God is angry, but it is not a hasty kind of anger. We also see that the Lord Jesus was angry, but it was not hasty anger either. He went out and deliberately made a whip to drive out the money changers.  
  
2. When the anger is without real cause.  Matthew 5:22 "But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (KJV)  Again, we see this with the Lord Jesus Christ as well as with God that His anger is not without cause.   
  
3. When the anger is long-lasting. Ecclesiastes 7:9 "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."  Ephesians 4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." I praise the Lord that His anger does not last forever. However, there are some who have been angry with others for years. Perhaps something was done, a word was spoken or there was a grievance of some kind that for years has been held against another person with no reconciliation.  
  
When it comes to relationships we need to recognize anger and the terrible damage it does. Jay Adams in his book, COMPETENT TO COUNSEL says: "90% of counseling problems has its roots in anger. Along with the sad and the bad - we should look out for the mad."

Chapter 23

Recognizing Anger – Part 2

Proverbs 15:18 "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel."

Proverbs 19:19 "A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again."

Proverbs 22:24 "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered."

Proverbs 29:22 "An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one  
commits many sins."

When dealing with relationships, anger is something that must be looked at.   
Or, perhaps I should say that anger ought to be identified. Some people's anger is easy to recognize because the person 'explodes,' but some types of anger are not so easily recognizable, but yet are just as damaging.  
  
The first type is the anger where the person 'explodes,' 'blows up,' like  
with a small bomb. He gets everything out, but he most usually kills any   
relationships with those around him. It is hard for this person to build any real lasting relationships as he often loses friends as one never knows what might set that person off. People are always on guard to make sure that they do not ignite the fuse to cause the person to 'explode,' so to speak.  
  
Explosive anger is often aimed at hurting others. Anger like this is   
directed towards a person or persons. In an abusive relationship, explosive  
anger is at work. The husband explodes towards the wife and often the wife in turn towards the children. The Bible talks about a hot-tempered man. We see from our text that a hot tempered man commits many sins. This is the type of anger that can lead to murder, and often does.  
  
In dealing with anger, another aspect that we need to recognize is holding  
in anger. Instead of exploding - he implodes. This type of anger also hurts relationships. When one is around a person who holds in anger, one senses that something is not right and therefore begins to hold back from any real commitment to the person or relationship.  
  
This type of anger is hard to recognize. You realize that something is definitely wrong, but you cannot put your finger on what the problem really is. A person who holds in anger is like a fish out of the water. He is slippery. Trying to get a grip on what the problem is we find the solution slipping out of our hands.  
  
A person who explodes gets everything out. This is good, but this anger directed towards another person hurts others. The person who implodes hurts himself. Eventually this anger comes out, but in a different form such as with ulcers, high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries and many other diseases that harm the physical body.  
  
A person who is holding in anger becomes irritable, sullen, tense and   
miserable and never seems to be able to say anything nice about another   
person or thing. Needless to say, this is not the type of behavior that   
attracts other people. Consequently relationships suffer.  
  
It is important for a person who is imploding to recognize how this type of   
anger hurts themselves, their own body.  This person needs to change his behavior patterns and the way he thinks. Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things."  
  
Dealing with this type of anger it is important for this person to first recognize that this is anger and call it for what it really is: SIN. Because the heart is deceitful we can very easily be deluded into thinking that because we did not explode that we do not have the problem of anger.  
  
The third type of anger is perhaps the most subtle and I believe the most   
deadly: blaming others. The way to break a relationship the fastest is to   
start blaming. Perhaps we do not look at this as anger, but in reality this is what it is.

Right at the dawn of human history we see this anger being manifested.  
When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and God came down and asked them what they had done, we see the blame game being played out. Adam blamed God (the wife YOU gave me), then blamed his wife and Eve blamed the serpent and this has been the story ever since. It is always someone else's fault. No one wants to take responsibility.  
  
Today we live in an environment where personal responsibility by an  
individual is not required. Someone gets fired from a job and it is the employer's fault. Things don't seem to work out at home it is someone else's fault. People just don't seem to understand that it is their own fault.   
  
In building and maintaining relationships it is important for us to  
recognize anger and to deal with it. Later we will be looking at how to deal with anger in a biblical way.

**Chapter 24**

Causes of Anger – Part 3

Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”  
  
When we think of the causes for anger several things come to mind that we need to consider. First and foremost that man is born with an angry streak, a.k.a. the “Adamic nature of man.” I have two grandsons that are very enjoyable to be with, but every now and then I see this anger streak being manifested. We need to take into consideration that anger is a part of every man.  
  
However, we also need to understand that anger is brought about by teaching as well, in that we *learn* to be angry. We see this with dogs. Take a dog that has a very agreeable disposition and start treating the dog in a bad way and we see that good disposition turning. We can turn a docile dog into a mad dog through a learning process.  
  
One psychologist said: "Although anger and hostility are normal - we differ greatly, both individually and as groups, in degree and frequency of the hostile feeling we experience.” These differences in a large part stem from one's learning or past experiences.  
  
If we look internationally we see how violence is used in disputes, against disagreement. On the television and movies we see how anger is so often used to settle arguments, etc.

Here in the USA, part of the great debate that we have at the moment in our culture is whether or not violence on television and in the movies has anything to do with the violence in our homes, schools and communities. The answer is YES. We are being programmed to think that anger and violence is the way to settle disputes.  
  
However, another cause for anger that we need to recognize is that this emotion often comes in response to frustration. In this definition, frustration can be defined by: any obstacle that hinders our progress towards a goal.  
  
I get ready to go somewhere and when I get into the car I find that my tire is flat. I get frustrated and then angry because I am being impeded from reaching my goal. I am writing a report and I get a phone call that interrupts me from reaching my goal and I find myself becoming frustrated and angry. I am doing something when my wife interrupts me with another task to do and again I find myself upset and angry. Why? Because my goal has been interrupted.  
  
In this we see three things about anger. First, this is the Adamic nature of man. We see this coming out with Cain when he rises up and kills his brother Abel. We read that he was angry, his human nature. Secondly, Cain learned anger through his encounter with God. God had told him what to do, but he refused to do it. Disobedience to God spurs anger in man. Obedience to God creates peace and joy in man. Thirdly, we see that Cain was frustrated to the point of anger and instead of obeying God in his sacrifice, he took his anger out on his brother. God had said to Cain that if he did right, making the proper sacrifice, God would accept him.

Cain could’ve prevented his own frustration and anger by simple obedience. As we look out at all the frustration and violence today we can see why it is there, and rapidly growing.

Chapter 25

Handling Anger – Part 4

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”

In dealing with anger the question that comes up is: How do we handle  
anger?  
  
Many people today in our culture handle anger in a negative way. What I mean is that they handle it by denying it. They deny that they are angry and pretend to be at peace. Here in the Western world we live in a culture saturated with denial. I am not an alcoholic; I am not a drug addict, I am not abusive to my wife, I am not angry with you, etc., even when the evidence is completely the opposite.  
  
Another way a person handles anger in a negative way is to attack something or someone else. Our culture teaches us to pass the blame. I was reading an article where an FBI agent was fired because he embezzled $2,000.00 to pay for his gambling debt. He went to court and successfully argued that his gambling problem was due to something else in his life. He was excused and had to be reinstated back into the FBI.  
  
However, this is the way that many people handle anger. They attack someone else by blaming others, like their wife, children, parents, colleagues or their circumstances. We find that most people do not take the blame for their own actions.  
  
Another negative way of dealing with anger is to turn in upon ourselves.   
This leads to self-criticism and sometimes suicide. I used to have a little talking doll in my office with the saddest and most pathetic face and when I said something it would respond through sentences that were stored up inside of the doll, like: “I am a disease. I make myself sick...” This is one way we learn to be angry with ourselves to the point of hurting ourselves or ending our life.  
  
Withdrawal is another negative way to respond to anger. This is probably the way a person who has the tendency to implode responds to anger: he withdraws.  
  
What we need to do with anger is to respond to it in a positive way. This   
means that we will attack the problem and not the person; that we will see the circumstance as an opportunity; etc. Remember that anger is sinful when it is directed towards others in order to hurt them. When anger comes up we need to see what the problem is and identify what is really making us angry or fearful.  
  
Along with that we must also learn to control our anger. Proverbs gives us some good advice. Proverbs 16:32 "Better a patient man than a warrior; a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." Proverbs 25:28 "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." Patience and self-control are fruits of the Spirit and they are powerful.  
  
In our relationships we must always be moving towards reconciliation. When reconciliation is done in a biblical way this is the right solution to the problem. Reconciliation comes when we see what the real problem is. Working through the problem with another person makes us slow to get angry.  
  
Jay Adams said: "90% of counseling has its roots in anger. Along with the sad and the bad we should look out for the mad."

Chapter 26

Biblical Self-Esteem – Part 1

Romans 12:3 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."  
  
How we see ourselves will affect how we see others; what we think about ourselves will often be seen in what we think about others; how we feel about ourselves will be seen in how we feel about others. In other words it is important to have the right thoughts, feelings, etc. about ourselves if we are going to develop healthy relationships.  
  
There is a healthy, honest self-esteem that God wants. In the weeklies to follow we will be looking at some of this and how it relates to developing healthy relationships.  
  
When someone has a poor self-image it has an effect on him as a person, but also makes it difficult for him to be able to relate to others in a healthy and mature way.  
  
Someone who lacks self-esteem is easily threatened by other people and will always seem uncomfortable in the presence of others. Naturally it is hard for a person like this to relate to others which is necessary in building relationships.  
  
An individual with a low self-esteem has a tendency to become defensive. As he is not sure of himself he will question everything that is being said.  
  
This is the type of person who will constantly be comparing himself with others and in so doing will have the tendency to condemn himself. And it is hard to build strong relationships when there is a condemning spirit towards ourselves or someone else.  
  
When we talk about self-esteem we also need to be very careful because the real culprit destroying relationships is SELF that manifests itself in many forms.  
  
When I mention self-esteem it is important to understand just what I mean by it. I am not talking about building self-up, making self-more important or more reliant. This is not the case at all. Jesus told us that we must deny self not pity self. It is out of self (sin singular) that all of the  
other things (sins plural) come. For example why do I get mad or angry?   
Isn't it because self has been crossed? Why do I feel jealous or envious? Isn't it because self is not recognized? Sins plural that we commit stem from sin singular (self).   
  
So when we talk about self-esteem we need to keep these things in mind. I am not talking about building up self, but we are coming to the Word of God to see what the Lord has to say about me. Not what someone else might be saying or what I might think about me, but what does God say about me.  
  
When I get God's perspective about myself it will help me to have God's   
perspective on others because we all have been made in the image of God.  
  
It is easy to love those who love us, but what about those who do not love us? Can we love them?  God's perspective will help me relate to others who may be more difficult to love, to actually love the unloving.  
  
Because of what I have already said I hate to use the word self, but for not having a better word this is the one that I will have to use.

In all of this we need to have God's perspective.  
  
As we go through with these e-mails we will see that our self-image will  
emerge out of who we are in Christ and when we find out who we are 'in  
Christ' that in turn will affect our relationship with others. Might God  
give us real wisdom.

Chapter 27

Biblical Self-Esteem – Part 2

In order to understand ourselves as well as others we must have an understanding of who God is and to have a healthy concept of Him (as all of this is important in building relationships).  
  
So often we have equated God with some bad experience. Perhaps we grew up in a home with abusive parents and consequently this affected our view of God. It is hard to think of God as a Father when we have never experienced a loving father here on earth. I think of so many homes today where there is only one parent, most usually a mother. The father fled long ago leaving the mother to raise the child.  
  
We read in Hebrews 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please God,   
because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."  In the development of relationships  
it is important that we start with God and the first step is “that God exists,” as we read in Hebrews 11:6. It is amazing how many Christian atheists we have in our churches today.  
  
My thoughts about God will be seen by my thoughts about myself as well as others. Wrong thoughts about God lead to wrong thoughts about others and myself. This is a real problem today and one of the reasons we have breakdown in relationships. It comes back to a wrong concept of God.  
  
When we come to the place where we believe that God exists then there are two things that we must consider:

Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"  
  
1. He is who He claims to be. He is not a man; He is God. This is the  
first thing that we should keep in mind. We believe that He exists.

2. He keeps His Word. He is not a man that He should lie. Man will lie,  
but this is not true with God. He is the truth and what He says will be the truth. This is so important in the society that we live in where truth has become relative (humanistic worldview) or in some quarters there is no recognition of such a thing as truth (postmodernism).  
  
Anything we do must be built on the foundation of who God is. This is  
important when it comes to building and maintaining relationships. The reason that this is important is because God gives us the principles that we are to live and govern our lives by.  
  
Therefore, to take God at His Word, first we must believe that God exists and that what He says - we can count on; His Word is true and accurate.

Chapter 28

Biblical Self-Esteem – Part 3

In building on who God is; that He is who He claims to be and He will keep His Word, we need to see what God will do. This is important in being able to build strong relationships.  
  
We read in Colossians 1:13-14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."   
  
Here we see that He has brought us into another kingdom - the kingdom of heaven. Someone rightly said that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of right relationships.  
  
We see that He has given us redemption, the forgiveness of sins. It is important for us to understand this because what separates us from  
God as well as man is SIN. Here we see that we have been forgiven.  
What does this mean in the context of relationships? First it means that  
the barrier, SIN, which was there, has now been removed. We have been   
reconciled and this is the message that we are to carry to the ends of   
the earth: reconciliation.  
  
Secondly it means that we have been accepted. Ephesians 1:5-7 "Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath **made us accepted in the beloved**. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (It comes out more powerfully in this King James Version of the Bible.) We have been accepted!  
  
Why is it so important to be accepted? One of the basic human needs we have is to be accepted. And one of the ways that Satan keeps people locked up in the different kingdoms of this world is through the bars of acceptance. People sense acceptance from the wrong people and identify with those who accept them as they are. This acceptance is stronger than bars of steel.   
  
When we do not feel accepted in a relationship, it is hard for us to accept others, but when this need is met (as it is in Christ) then we can begin to accept others. We need to see that this acceptance is not based upon our performance, and nothing that we have done, but it is all about what Christ has done for us. It is based upon His promise. This is why it is important for us to have a healthy concept of God. He is not a man that He should lie. If He says He accepts me in Christ then this is what He does.  
  
When I am accepted, not depending upon what I do or not do, then it becomes easier for me to accept others. One of the basic laws of the kingdom of God is acceptance or reception. It is hard for a person locked up in one of the kingdoms of this world to enter into the kingdom of God when there is no sense of acceptance from those that are in the kingdom of God. It is a scary thing to leave a kingdom of this world for another kingdom because of this human need of acceptance.  
  
What will God, who is not a man that He should lie, do for me? He will accept me not because of what I do (my performance), but because of His promise. Isaiah tells us: "The LORD Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.' For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" Isaiah 14:24, 27

**Praise God that we have been accepted in the Beloved!**

Chapter 29

Self-Esteem - Part 4

Our concept of God affects our concept of ourselves since we are made in the image of God.

God will accept us in Christ. However, we need to also see that God is a God of purpose and plan. First we read in Psalm 138:8 that He has a specific plan for us all. "The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever - do not abandon the works of your hands." But He has a general plan for us as well. “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

One of the things that I am learning is that to understand God's plan for me - both specifically as well as generally - I need the interaction with the rest of the Body of Christ. This is where the importance of relationships comes in. We do not discover ourselves in solitude, but only when we share and give of ourselves. We need one another and this can also be threatening. A real problem that we have in the church today is that it is very easy to leave a fellowship and go someplace else where our interaction with one another can remain shallow. Consequently, we postpone the spiritual growth that God wants and desires in our life.

We begin to see and understand God's concern and care for us when we read Scripture. Jeremiah 29:11 “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Through the interaction of the Body of Christ we begin to know this concern and care. This comes back to building strong biblical relationships. One of the great needs, humanly speaking, is for community with a sense of belonging and family. It is through this type of atmosphere that God expresses Himself.

Another aspect of what God will do through the Body is to give us guidance. How important this is for each one of us! How often we wished that God would speak to us in a clear voice and tell us what to do. I believe that God has given guidance through His Body, but maybe we did not listen or like what we heard.

Psalms 37:23 "If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm."

Job 23:10 “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

Hebrews 2:11-12 ”So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.’”

Romans 8:37-39 “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In these verses we see God's concern, love and guidance for His children. These are concepts of God that we need to understand and take a hold of. Our concept of God affects our concept of ourselves.

We read in Scripture that God gives us spiritual gifts for the common good of the Body. Look at some of those gifts. We have the gift of wisdom. Could a person with this gift give us insight to some of the things that we might need and should be doing? I believe so. What about the gift of knowledge in showing us right from wrong? We live in a society where the line of right and wrong is becoming very unclear, as Tozer said: “Truth and error walk the same highway.”  How often we have needed men and women with the gift of knowledge to help us out in some of these unclear times.

All of these things are to give us a clear concept of God and in so doing also amore clearer concept of ourselves - made in the image of God.

Chapter 30

Biblical Self-Esteem – Part 5

Ephesians 2:10  “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”  
  
Another thing that we need to think about is: What does God say about me? We all have developed a self-image, a mental picture of who we are based on what others have said about us. Throughout our lives comments have been made about us.  Subconsciously we listened to these comments and through them have formed a mental picture of ourselves. The problem is that we most usually do not move out of the parameters of that self-image that we have formed. If we have been told throughout our lives that we are a failure then it is hard for us to succeed.  
  
To get a real understanding of who we are we need to go to God and let God show us what He thinks about us and let that be the mental picture that we form. He is the One who knows us through and through and we have already seen that what He says is not a lie since He cannot lie. What He says will be truthful.  
  
So what does God have to say about me and you? Romans 9:20-21 "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"  
  
This is perhaps one of the first things that we need to consider: we are “lumps of clay” that God molds, some for honor or dishonor, for important or less important jobs. There are times when the lady of the house might take out the Chinaware for important guests or for a special occasion, but most usually she uses the mugs and regular dishes.  
  
What it all boils down to is that we are just what the Lord wanted. We should not try to be something that we aren't, but to be what the Lord made us to be. What a liberation this is when we can be ourselves and not try to be like someone else.  
  
Carrying on there are several things about us that need to be mentioned. First of all, we are forgiven sinners. Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is very important in coming to an understanding of whom and what I am. Satan will try and bring up the past, but we need to refuse to listen to  
him.   
  
1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Because of what Christ has done I can walk in newness of life every day. I can keep a short account with God and be as if I have never sinned.  
  
2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" What does God say about me? You? If we are in Christ we are a new creation. We have a new hope. We are unique. We are the only one of our kind. Each one of us then will bring out something different about the uniqueness of Christ.  
  
This is the reason why irresponsible behavior keeps us from having a healthy self-esteem. James 4:17 "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." If I know what responsible behavior is and I act irresponsibly, then it is sin. When we act responsibly we become more aware of our self-worth.  
  
What is responsible behavior? It is when I agree with God what sin is. What He calls sin, I call sin. One of the problems that we have in our society that is tearing us apart is the blame game. This started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. We have a tendency to shift the blame. "It is not my fault," but because of someone or something else.  
  
We have seen that one form of anger is blaming one another. It is the most subtle, but the one that tends to separate friends and ruin relationships more than anything else.

Some years ago I was one of the speakers in an Operation World Conference in Bangalore, India. During a Q&A session one of the pastors asked the question: “Do you speakers ever feel jealous or envious when someone preaches, teaches, administrates, etc. better than you.” Good question. One of the speakers answered and said that when he was younger that was the case, but when he got older he began to recognize who he was in the Lord with the gifting that he was given by God and he came to accept who and what he was in Christ. And so when he saw someone speak, teach, etc. better than him he praised God for his brother. This is someone who knows who he is in Christ and accepts it.

Chapter 31

Biblical Self-Esteem – Part 6

I believe it is very easy for us to misunderstand what is meant by biblical self-esteem. The biggest problem that we face is one’s self. In one sense ‘self’ is public enemy number one. When it comes to my relationships with others and my relationship with God - it is myself that is often the problem.  
  
One of the things that we need to think about is this: What is the difference between biblical self-esteem (the way that we have been looking at it) and self-centeredness? I would like to give some thought to this difference.  
  
Comparison is probably the first thing that comes to our mind. What do I mean by this?  Self-centeredness says: "I am more important," but biblical self-esteem says: "I am important." Do we see the difference? Whenever we begin to compare ourselves with others, it is wrong.  
  
Self-centeredness will try to not only compare him/herself with others, but try and compete or even feel superior to someone else. This is wrong and will destroy relationships.  
  
Biblical self-esteem simply confirms what God says about us. Again, we need to go back and see what the Lord says about us. God reaffirms His love for us. We are lumps of clay that He is shaping. Often we do not like what we see, but we must keep in mind that God is not through with us yet. We will become a true son or daughter of God; for in Christ Jesus we have become a new creation, with a new hope and a bright future.  
  
Why is it important for us to know what the Lord thinks about us? We tend to behave according to what we think people think about us. If we think that people think of us as screw-ups then we have a tendency to behave that way.  
  
It is important for me to know what the Lord really thinks about me, because it will affect my behavior for good or bad. It will affect my relationship with the Lord. In other words, my fellowship with God is determined by what I think He thinks about me.  
  
Relating to the Lord in the right way helps me to relate to others in the right way. I will no longer be comparing myself to others, and I will accept others more freely as God does. This in turn liberates me to fulfill my individual function in the Body of Christ, so that the Lord’s Church is fulfilling the will of God.

Chapter 32

Communication – Part 1

It would seem that one of the great problems of the human race is the inability to communicate with one another. Many problems have come because of this. This lack of communication is another result of SIN.  
  
When it comes to communication and developing our communication skills there are four things we need to keep in mind, and in this chapter I want to cover them. What are they?  
  
1. **Talking**

There are several Scripture verses for this in Proverbs.

Proverbs 10:19 "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise."

Proverbs 21:23 "He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity."

Proverbs 29:20 "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

Talking is one of the components in communication, but we see that it is surrounded by parameters like the above Scripture verses. How many times have we 'put our foot in our mouth' and afterwards wished that we had kept our mouth shut.  
  
2. **Listening**

Proverbs 18:13 "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame."

James 1:19 "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."   
  
Someone said that when God gave us two ears and one mouth He has given us a visual aid of what is most important in communication. However, for some of us it seems to be the other way around and we have one ear and two mouths.  
  
Sometimes it seems that we have a brain in second gear, but a mouth that is running in high gear. We would probably be a better partner if we were deaf and dumb.  
  
3. **Understanding**

This is another component in communication that we often forget. Do we really understand what others are saying? We hear the words, but do we understand what is being said?  
  
So often we assume that our wife, husband, children or whoever is thinking a particular thing, but how do we know? In these different components of communication we see that each one is a little harder.  
  
It is easy to talk. Most of us have no problem with this, but when it comes to listening that is another story. That is harder and when it comes to understanding this takes even more effort. Most of the time we do not want to invest the time and effort to really come to an understanding of what someone might be trying to communicate.  
  
4. **Desire**

This another component in communication. Sometimes the problem is not the inability to understand, but the desire is not there to take the time and effort to understand what is being communicated to us.  
  
Francis of Assisi said: "That I might seek to understand more than to be understood." What a statement! We all want to be understood, don't we? But are we ready to take the time, energy, etc. to actually understand others?  
  
In developing relationships the art of communication is a great must. We must work on these four components since none of this happens automatically. It takes work. Might God help us to be better communicators!

Chapter 33

Communication – Part 2

Communication is a must for developing relationships with our wife, husband, children, colleagues and friends. In the last chapter we looked at the four essential proponents of communication. I would like to look at how it is essential to build common interests that in turn helps to have meaningful communication. In other words, the more we have in common the more communication we can have.   
  
My wife and I were in Finland on the Operation Mobilization's ship M/V LOGOS II. There I had a great time with the leadership of the ship. We had real communication because of our common interests. Having previously lived on the OM ships I knew the problems as well as the blessings in the ministry onboard.   
  
It is stated that 50% of marriage will be without children. One of the reasons for divorces among people who have been married for 30 years or more is because after the children are grown there are no other common interests and if both parties have gone their own way in interests, divorce is a sad reality.  
  
For many couples, when the children were at home the common interests understandably were with the children, but after the children are gone if husbands and wives don’t have any other common interest there is the natural tendency to separate. How much do we have in common with our children, spouses and even people in our own fellowships?  
  
One of the things that we need to do is move towards more involvement with one another. One would think that this should be easy within the family of God and that there would be many things that we could be involved with, but often this is not the case!  
  
There are some things that we as God's people should have a common interest in: God’s Word, prayer, worship, world evangelism, all the things that pertain to God and who we are in Him. We all should have this in common as our firm foundation in our life, but there are also other things in life, other than our children, that as husbands and wives – we have as common interests; things we enjoy doing together, that interest us.   
  
When I was the director of Operation Mobilization's ship, the M/V DOULOS, people often wanted to know how we could have unity with such a variety of people. Among the 300 people on board we had people of 40-50 different nationalities, different denominations, different upbringing, etc., yet in the midst of such diversity we had a tremendous unity because we had a common interest: world evangelism, and this brought us together so that we were able to overcome all the different things that could have separated us.  
  
One of the things breaking up families today is that among the different family members there is no common interest. Each member has gone their own way and developed their own interests, and consequently there is *a lack of communication*; then relationships suffer and are hindered from growing strong.  
  
One of the things that I am learning is that it takes time and effort to develop common interests, and this is a must in order to be effective in communicating with one another.

Might God give us creative ways to develop common interests within our families, with friends, etc. in order to be effective communicators.

Chapter 34

Communication – Part 3

Thinking about relationships and how communication plays a part in it, we need to sharpen our sensitivity towards others. We might be sensitive about ourselves, but what about others? Are we sensitive to them, their feelings, hurts, pain? How do we come across in our conversation?  
  
Albert Moravian of Yale University said that we communicate by  
words 7%, by the tone of our voice 38%, and by facial expressions, bodily language or gestures 55%. Looking back over my own life I see how true this really is. When I was the director of Operation Mobilization's ship DOULOS I often saw how I communicated by my bodily language more than what I said.  
  
For example, when we came into a particular port I remember leaning over the railing of ship, observing the different maneuvers the deck people were making in order to safely tie us up to the berth. A brother came along and started talking to me. I heard every word that he said, but he didn't say anything that needed my response as far as words were concerned. When he had finished I turned and walked away. I hadn't said anything to him. He followed me into the lounge area of the ship and said to me that I had deeply hurt him. I was dumbfounded and so I asked him what I had done.  
  
He had felt offended that I did not acknowledge him when he was talking to me. I brought him into my office where I apologized and had a word of prayer with him. What had I done wrong? I was not sensitive to him. Through my body language I had communicated that he was not worthy to listen to. I had offended my brother in Christ.  
  
I found the same thing with the tone of my voice. Although I might use the right words, because the tone of my voice is deep it comes out different from what I intended to say. Again sensitivity is needed.  
  
We are told in Ephesians 4:30-32 "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."  
  
Being a good communicator means that we will sharpen our sensitivity to others, not that we will be sensitive about ourselves. We need to be asking ourselves questions like: Am I really communicating what I want? Am I sensitive to how I am coming across through my bodily language and tone of voice?  
  
Perhaps the family is the best place with your spouse and children to learn how to become a better communicator in order to develop solid biblical relationships.   
  
Perhaps this is what God meant when He said that we should let our light be put on a stand to give light to all in the house. Matthew 5:14 "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."  
  
Isn't this a problem in many homes today; that of a lack of communication or wrong communication? I know for myself that it has been in the home where I have had to repent and ask for forgiveness more often than perhaps any place else.  
  
Might God help us to build a greater sensitivity to one another and to our God.

Chapter 35

Communication – Part 4

One other aspect of communication that I would like to mention in this series is in becoming a more interesting person. Let’s face it, some of us are simply a bore. We seem to have very little to talk about but ourselves, and that can become quite boring.  
  
When we talk about this it is bringing in the idea of attitude. Often what we need is a change of attitude. Too often our attitude is negative, always seeing the bleak side of things. This has nothing to do with age. I have seen young people who have been quite interesting to communicate with and older people who I would just as soon avoid. Like Henry Van Dyke said: "I shall grow old, but never lose life's zest, because the road's last turn will be the best.”  
  
In John 10:10 Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Do we believe this? Or perhaps what I should say and ask is: Are we experiencing this abundant life that Jesus spoke about? Are we excited about being alive? Do we have an eagerness to meet with God and hear what He has to say? What we need is an enthusiasm for life. Elizabeth Barren Browning said: "What frightens me is that men are content with what is not life at all.”  
  
Yes, we do get enthusiastic about sports or some other activity, but what about the things of God? Joseph Hadyn when he was criticized about the gaiety in his church music, replied: "When I think of God, my heart is so filled with joy that the notes fly off the spindle.”  
  
Another thing that we need to keep in mind is to learn to talk to our Heavenly Father. To cultivate our horizontal relationships we need to cultivate the vertical relationship with our God.  
  
One thing about prayer is that it will begin to change things that need to be changed. A lady came to the sculptor Rodin and asked if it was difficult to work as a sculptor. Rodin replied: “Not at all Madam, you simply buy a block of marble and chip away what you do not want.”  
  
One of the things about prayer is that God, through prayer, begins to chip away at things in our lives that He does not want. We find that as our intimacy with God grows - so does our relationship with others.  
  
One of the effects and consequences of sin is that it tears down relationships. We see the broken relationship with God and Adam, and then between Adam and his wife. We need to work on this relationship with our Creator and it is through prayer that this comes about.  
  
Talking frequently with our Heavenly Father brings us into a quiet place so that when we are dealing with one another in the noise of everyday life we are not so easily ruffled.  
  
I have noticed with husbands and wives that when they do not daily meet with God, there seems to be more fighting with one another. This daily or frequent talking with our Heavenly Father and listening to Him in His Word brings us into a place where we see things in their right priority.  
  
Communicating daily with our heavenly Father helps us to daily communicate with one another. My prayer for myself, my family and for the body of Christ is to become better communicators of things that matter most in life, and in so doing build real lasting relationships.

Chapter 36

Interpersonal Relationships: Love – Part 1

Love is an important ingredient in building relationships. However, I cannot think of another word that is as misunderstood as this word. In the English language we use this word for so many things. For example: I love my dog, cat, or I love to drive, fish or hunt and then in the midst of all of this we say, “I love God” or “I love my neighbor.” When it comes to God and our neighbor the word ‘love’ has lost its meaning.  
  
Another problem that we face is that love is often divorced from truth, and yet the two go together like a hand and glove and cannot be separated. I have said it before that love without truth is a wishy washy sentimentality and truth without love is hypocrisy. The two must go together.  
  
One of the problems in our Western civilization is that truth is under attack. We live in a society where a belief in absolute truth does not exist. Sad to say, this has affected the church. It has been estimated that one out of every four adults and one out of every ten teen-agers do not believe in any absolute truth. Moral relativism has taken over.  
  
This means that love is not only divorced from truth, but also that we should not pass any judgment on anyone, and that our experience with one another should be based on feelings or how we feel at the time. Love must be the cornerstone in any relationship, but when love is based only on feelings rather than on truth then we will find the whole relationship based on feelings, which is not a very strong foundation. No wonder we have so many broken relationships in our society today when everything depends on how we happen to be feeling.  
  
It is important to come back to the Bible and discover what love really is, the type of love that only God can generate. This is the love that we saw demonstrated at the cross when Jesus said: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do."  
  
The thing that impresses people more than anything else is the quality of love being expressed in godly inter-personal relationships. “They will know that we are Christians by our love.” What did the Apostle John say: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35  
  
Since we are to love one another as He loved us, there is a question that we must ask: How did Jesus love us? To answer this question there are four things that we must look at and consider.  
  
**1. He gave.** This is one aspect of love to consider when we think about Jesus loving us. We see this coming out in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that **he gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." So often in our human concept of love there is the *taking* instead of the *giving*.  
  
**2. He forgave.** Instead of Christ cursing and complaining when they hung Him on the cross we hear forgiveness. “Father **forgive** them for they know not what they do.” This is another aspect of love that we need to consider. Again, it has nothing to do with our feelings, but it is an act of our will.  
  
**3. He was aware.** Another aspect of this love is a spiritual sensitivity, being aware of where people are and the conditions and situations that they might be in. We see this with Jesus, our example. He was aware of where His disciples were, as well as the people that He ministered to. The Bible records this about Jesus: “He was moved with compassion.”  
  
**4. He accepted**. In the KJV of the English Bible we read in Ephesians 1:6 "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us **accepted** in the beloved." AGAPE love will accept us as we are. This is what the Lord did with us. He accepted us like we were. We read that while we were yet sinners He died for us. He didn't wait until we could somehow change and make ourselves ready, but He accepted us like we were. 'Just as I am,' like the old well-known hymn sings out. We have been accepted in the Beloved.  
  
Isn't this one of the problems that we have in our interpersonal   
relationships; we are waiting for people to change before we accept them?

Chapter 37

Love – Part 2

Ephesians 4:1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."   
  
A definition of love that we can adopt is: Unselfish concern that freely accepts another and seeks his/her good. The quality of love being expressed in interpersonal relationships is what impresses people. In the next few chapters we want to look at this quality and see what it is and what it means.   
  
The first thing that comes out in Ephesians 4 is the word “humble.” What does it mean to be humble? They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Perhaps the best illustration of all of this is Christ Himself who lived out humility as described in Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."   
  
The idea is lowliness of mind in the sense that we consider others better than ourselves. We read in Matthew 11:28-29 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."   
  
In this passage of Scripture we see a rest that comes when we initially come to Christ, a rest from sin and guilt. We all have experienced this rest.  However, it seems that there is another rest that comes, and inner rest, when we take His yoke and learn from Him.

When we apply and exercise this quality of lowliness to personal relationships we immediately eliminate competition and tension. We don't have the stress of comparison, of demanding our rights. By putting other people’s interests before ours we find a quietness that comes into our soul.   
  
I have found that sometimes men are threatened by their wives because of some qualities that the wife has that the man doesn't. Rather than accepting what the Lord has given us we find a restlessness coming in that in turn breaks down communication and relationships. Of course this is true not just in a husband and wife relationship, but it can happen in all our relationships as well.   
  
I should say that the exercise of this quality not only gives rest to our souls, but I also believe it gives health to our bodies. How many of our physical ailments can be attributed to the upset of broken relationships? According to some doctors, quite a few. Like Jay Adams said, “In looking out for the sad and bad we need to be aware of the mad.”    
  
What do we need to do? Take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. This again takes us back to the example of Philippians 2:5-8; for our Lord chose to humble Himself before people. This is the way we need to be.

Chapter 38

Love – Part 3

Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Looking at the quality of love that only God manufactures and that is essential to building relationships we need to understand what it means to be “gentle in love.”

The word for ‘gentle’ here is not something that consists only in a person's outward behavior nor in our relationship to other people. It is something referring more to an inner work of grace in our soul. It is the type of spirit that accepts God's dealings with us. It recognizes that what the Lord is doing is for our good.

It is what Paul said in Romans 5:3-5: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

It is through hardship, trouble and persecution that our good character is developed that is then conducive to building good and lasting relationships. It is the love of God and His working through our suffering that molds a character that can build relationships.

We all have seen and been around people whose personality grates upon us and we want to depart from such a person, but it is those that have a gentle meekness about them (self under control) that we can enjoy being around.

Colossians 3:12 says that we should “clothe ourselves with gentleness.”

Although this is a meekness or gentleness towards God first and foremost - it is also an attitude towards other people and our relationship to them.

This word for *gentle* in the NIV and *meekness* in the KJV is hard to translate into English. The words have a sense of weakness to them, but in reality it is just the opposite. Vines says: "The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was 'meek' in that he knew he had the infinite resources of God at His command." We do too!

Moses was the meekest man on earth, but when he came down the mountain with God’s Ten Commandments and saw the debauchery taking place among God’s people - he was anything but weak in confronting it and condemning their evil behavior.

The word used for *gentle* here is the opposite of being self-assertive or self-interested. The problems we have in relationships is that of being self-assertive and self-absorbed.

We see then in developing relationships how important this quality of love’s *gentleness* is. What steps are we to take? Perhaps I can suggest several.

1. When God brings things our way that we do not like let us not argue and complain, but embrace and ask God for wisdom to show us what He is doing and wanting to accomplish in us through it.

2. Recognizing that *gentleness* or *meekness* is not at all weakness, but really strength under control.

3. Always keeping in mind the importance of good strong relationships.

May God continue to mold us in His image!

Chapter 39

Love – Part 4

Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

How often we have heard our parents or our colleagues say: “Patience is a great virtue.” Yet, if we look at our lives we see that no matter how great a virtue patience might be it isn't something that we have in great abundance.  
  
We know that in the love that God manufactures, patience is a powerful  
ingredient. We read in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that "**love is patient**, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." When we think of love in terms of personal relationships then we must give time to patience.

Patience in the sense of dealing with inter-personal relationships brings  
out the idea of 'longsuffering' or to be 'long tempered.' How true it is  
that when it comes to relationships we really need to be longsuffering and long tempered. How often people have made us mad and we have wanted to strike back either by word or deed or both. When long-suffering and long tempered come in this maintains the relationship. It doesn't mean that we do not deal with the issues at stake, but because of the practice of long-suffering and long-tempered (or simply being patient) we can deal with the issues without breaking the relationship.

Patience in relationships is seeing people from God's point of view and  
recognizing the fact that God is not done with us yet. We are all in  
constant change and God is working in us.   
  
Romans 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

Patience then is giving God time to finish what He has started in each one of us.

Psalms 138:8 "The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever - do not abandon the works of your hands."  
  
It would seem that closely tied in with patience is another virtue called forgiveness. Matthew 18:26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'"  
  
We all know the Lord’s parable here of where this man owed the king an  
astronomical amount of money and asked for patience in paying it back.  
It was granted, but then this man went out and found someone who owed him a pittance and patience was not what he granted him when asked for. Matthew 18:29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'"  
  
Whenever we have a tendency to lose patience with people it would do us well to stop and think about the patience that the Lord has had, and still does have with us.  
  
Another thought that comes out with patience is connected with the Lord's blessings. Hebrews 6:15 "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."

The problem that we have in our Western society is the clash between  
traditional values and evolving values. Traditional values like loyalty,  
morality, accountability and sacrifice are clashing with evolving values  
like independence, personal happiness, tolerance, comfort, instant  
gratification, the right to make one's own choices, all of which center  
around the individual.  
  
It is because of these evolving values that center around the individual  
that we find relationships (marriage, business partnerships, colleagues,  
etc.) in jeopardy and failing. Probably one of the great tragedies today is the desire for instant gratification even in our relationships. This is where patience comes in.

How do we get patience? Patience grows only in trials. When the trials come our way let us see what the Lord is doing and allow the Lord to work in us the patience of Christ Himself. Amen!

Chapter 40

Love – Part 5

Ephesians 4:1-2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Another aspect or characteristic of love is the idea of forbearance, or bearing with one another; making allowances for faults and weaknesses of others without passing judgment.  
  
Of course throughout this series we have seen that the Lord is our  
example. We read in Romans 2:4, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"  
  
In the English NIV Bible version this word forbearance is translated “tolerance.” However, the idea is to endure and bear with, and this is why in the KJV Bible version it is translated as forbearance.  
  
Today in our Western society we have a different understanding of what the Scriptures mean by tolerance, different than what we are looking at here. The tolerance that our society is trying to get across is having tolerance towards things and lifestyles that are in direct conflict with the Word of God. That is another kind of tolerance that has nothing to do with ‘right’ relationships.  
  
God is tolerant towards us, but that which is not in accord with His Word  
He will judge and so must we. We cannot be taken in by our society that tells us that we should be tolerant (in their definition) and not make any judgments of our own as to right or wrong.  
  
The way this word tolerance or forbearance is used in regards to  
relationships is that we decide in advance to bear that person up in their time of weakness. We all have faults and so we should be ready to hold each other up and encourage one another on in what is right and good.  
  
Just like patience and forgiveness go hand in hand so does tolerance   
(forbearance) and acceptance. As an act of our will we decide that we are  
going to accept that person as he/she is with their weakness and faults.  
This is what love is all about: acceptance of one another. We can accept the person without agreeing with their lifestyle.

So often we have communicated to our spouse, children and others that if they change we will accept them. Christ accepted us just like we are and because of His acceptance of us, and who He is, we want to change and not because we want to be accepted but because we have been accepted.

This does not mean that God is tolerant of our sinful behavior. NO! But He is tolerant towards us as individuals. He hates the sin, but loves the sinner.  
  
When this grace is operating in us the result is unity in our homes, schools, jobs, churches or wherever. Isn't this what we need today in our churches and society?

The Lord said: “Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the sons of God.” Sons, not children. There is a difference between sons and children and it is a difference of maturity. Sons speak of maturity whereas children speak of immaturity. Sons are the ones who can build and maintain right relationships.

The problem that we have in many of our churches is that we have too many children and not enough sons. When it comes to our relationships might we become mature, and more like God’s own Son. Amen? 