

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
22 June 2014

Rocky Relationships

Good morning! Today we're continuing our series on "Is There an App for That?" We're looking at the kinds of things that cause stress in our lives. And we want to ask is there something that will help to alleviate the stress or eliminate it totally. And the answer is yes, we can get that "App" so to speak from the Bible, not the iPhone. All we need to do is what? Let us read the verse which is the basis of this series:

"Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)

During the first week, we looked at our Faltering Faith and ways to counter that. The second week we looked at our joyless jobs and ways to overcome that. Today, we're going to look at our Rocky Relationships and ways to restore them.

Our relationships can stress us out greatly, don't they? There are relationships that have resulted in incredible and terrible situations.

In Orlando, a 48-year-old man was shot to death by his wife after a fight over the satellite TV controls. In California, a man was stabbed to death by his girlfriend because he brought home a McDonalds ham, egg, and cheese

bagel instead of the two Egg McMuffins that she'd asked for. (Husbands, let that be a lesson to all of you -- get it right!)

In Dallas, a 37-year-old man was beaten to death by his roommate after a fight over the thermostat setting in their house. In Maryland, a 15-year-old boy has been charged with in the shooting death of a man who was playing reggae music on his car stereo. Apparently, the boy really hates reggae music.

Although these are extreme cases and responses, it can be difficult maintaining positive relationships with others. As Christians we will have times of conflict; sometimes with a neighbor who seems unbearable, sometimes with an employer, customer, or government official who seems overly demanding or unfair, sometimes with a relative, fellow Christian or even another church. The answer to handling these type of problems is not revenge, hostility or avoidance of the problem. What does the Bible tell us about relationships?

The Bible tells us that we are to *"Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody."* (Romans 12:18) So our need and goal should be to know how to build better relationships. And the secret to great relationships, the Bible tells us, is humility. That's the key. Humility. 1 Peter 5:5 *"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another."* You're not dressed for successful relationships until you've learned the quality of humility.

There's one little problem. Humility is not a quality that you can develop by seeking it. The more you pursue humility, the more it's going to elude you. The more you focus on it, the less likely you're going to have it.

Humility is the one quality that disappears the moment you think you've got it. Have you ever heard of a book called "How to be Humble...Like Me"? Of course, there's none. Unless you like to be the one to write it.

Today, what I want to do is take this quality of humility and I want to apply it in a very personal and practical area of your life and that is this issue of restoring relationships. I'm going to give you six steps. If last Sunday it was a pointless message, today it's going to be a pointful message.

As I give you these six steps, I'd like for you to think of someone you need to restore a relationship with. Maybe the strain has been there and you're not even talking any more. These are the things you can do to rebuild that relationship.

It takes two, but you can do your part. As I give you these steps, I want to warn you. Every one of them takes humility in increasing degrees. In fact, they get harder as we go up the steps. The first step I share with you is very easy, the second is a little bit harder, the third is a little bit harder than that. By the time we get to step six you're going to be crying, "Uncle!" Because we're going to do some serious work on your character today. We're going to take you in deeper and deeper levels of humility than you've ever probably known so that God can bless you in ways that have never probably known.

One of the reasons why so many relationships fall apart is because, frankly, most people are unwilling to do the serious difficult work that humility requires. That's why the first step is...

1. ASK FOR GOD'S HELP.

In restoring your relationship, you must first ask for God's help. This is the easiest step because many of you probably ask for God's help all the time.

But it still does require a measure of humility because you must admit that you need help. This is the starting point.

James 4:6 says this *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* What is grace? Grace is the power to change. Grace is the power to heal a relationship. Grace is the power to get forgiveness and to offer forgiveness.

God gives grace to the humble. As long as you’re full of pride, God says, “Be My guest! Go ahead!” But when I humble myself and say, “God, I need Your help.” Then the power is released.

Let me say, if you’re serious about restoring a relationship, you’re going to need all the help you can get. Because this is not easy. It is not easy to restore a relationship. Humility is not easy. If it were easy we’d all be humble. It is difficult and that’s why I start by asking for God’s help.

2. AFFIRM THEIR VALUE

The person you’re trying to restore the relationship with, affirm their value. You go to the person and you express to them the reasons why you believe the relationship is worth saving. Why you believe they are important, why the relationship matters, why you’re willing to put in the effort, the energy, the time to try to make this thing right.

Romans 12:10 says, *“Have a profound respect for each other.”* We don’t follow that verse and that’s why we have conflict. I’d have to say that most of the arguments that Anabel and I have had together, many of them occurred that she did not feel that I was giving her the proper respect, either I wasn’t listening to her, or I wasn’t valuing what she said or I wasn’t paying attention to her time schedule like a meal that she had prepared on time and it was getting. When we don’t treat people with respect, it always causes conflict.

When you aren't treated with respect, it causes you to get angry. So the starting point in restoring a relationship after you've asked God for help is go and show some respect to the person by simply saying "I value you. You matter to me. You are important. I want to work on this relationship although it will be painful."

Philippians 2:3 *"Do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead be humble and give more honor to others than to yourself."* How do you do that? How do you give more honor to others than you give to yourself? Let me suggest two ways:

One is, listen to them. When you listen to a person, you are showing them honor. You are showing them respect. When I stop what I'm doing and look my wife in the face and look in her eyes and I listen to what she has to say, what that is saying is, "You matter to me. You are important. You are valuable."

In the past when we're in the car, and my wife converses with me and then say something I don't want to hear, when my cell phone rings, I'd immediately answer the phone. Not anymore. My hand would still struggle to reach my phone but I know I should listen to her. We all want to be listened to. You can affirm their value by listening.

Second, by validating their feelings. You show affirmation of their value by validating their feelings. I'm not saying you agree with their feelings. I'm not saying their feelings are legitimate or that they don't need to be changed. But that's not the time or place to do that. Feelings are simply feelings. They're neither good nor bad. There may be an idea behind that which is causing the feeling that is bad and that needs to be changed and needs to be

dealt with. But when people come to you to express their feelings, they don't need you to immediately "fix it". They don't need you to immediately try to change it. They just want it validated. Because when you feel it, you feel it. Somebody else may not, but you do. It's not right or wrong, it's just you.

Those of us who are fixers, we get in a hurry. When somebody comes to you saying, "I'm feeling depressed," you say, "You shouldn't feel depressed." That's real helpful!!! Or, "This makes me afraid," – "You shouldn't be afraid!" That's helpful too. "I'm worried," – "Don't be worried." Or "I'm angry," – "You shouldn't be angry!" You're invalidating their feelings when you do that. You're not affirming their value, you're decreasing their value, depreciating their value. So what you need to do is say "I understand how you're feeling," or "I'm sorry you feel that way," or "I hurt with you." But you don't invalidate it right up front. You affirm their feelings and you listen to them.

Once you've taken those two steps... and those are pretty much the easy ones... we now start turning up the heat a little bit.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE MY RESPONSIBILITY AND MY SIN.

This takes a little bit more courage. Galatians 6:5 says, "*Each person must be responsible for himself.*" You cannot build a strong, healthy relationship without accepting responsibility for your part of it. A relationship takes two people. It's never just one person's problem. If you want God's blessing on your relationship, you have to stop the blame game. Stop blaming other people and acknowledge your responsibility.

But more than that, you have to acknowledge your sin. Romans 3:23 "*For all [circle "all"] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Question:

Does that mean everybody on your row right now? This place is a haven of sin! We are in a den of sinners right now. Yes, we are saved but there's no denying the fact that we still sin. Because we're still in this mortal bodies that are easily tempted. But normally in a conflict, we don't admit our fault. We make excuses. Just think of your recent argument with your spouse. Weren't there a lot of blaming, of excuses? And why is that? Because of the oldest sin in the world, pride. Pride caused the downfall of Adam and Eve. They passed the blame to each other and eventually to the serpent, Satan. But, of course, I'm not absolving Satan. I'm trying to point out that he is the originator of the sin of pride because he thought he could be like God. And when we're acting prideful, we're letting Satan take a hold of our life. We don't want that to happen, do we?

We will never really start growing until we come to face the fact that we are essentially selfish, that we do not naturally think of other people first. You naturally think of yourself first. And the whole goal of life is learning to be unselfish. From the moment you're born you're going, "I!!!! Feed me! Diaper me! Clothe me! Pamper me! Burp me!" And everything else.

But as you mature, supposedly, you're going to get a little less self-centered and maturity and humility is thinking of God and others first. That's the character issue.

It takes humility to take this step. To acknowledge my sinfulness, my part of the breakdown and to apologize. But this is the step that breaks the gridlock, that gets the relationship moving again. This is the one that blows up the logjam and lets the river start flowing again. If you can't get past this one, saying those three important words "I was wrong", "I am sorry", "Please

forgive me”, if your throat chokes on those words, you will never have mature relationships. You will be stuck in a selfish walled -in world where you are the supreme being and you’re miserable.

Step four, and God turns the heat up a little bit more.

4. ALLOW THEM (the people you’re trying to build a relationship with) TO BE HUMAN.

We don’t want to let other people be human. We want to hold them to a standard that we, even ourselves can’t meet. We expect more of them that we would even of ourselves. Do you know anybody in this world who is faultless? Do you know anybody in this world who is without sin? Do you know anybody who is perfect? Do you know anybody who has no weaknesses? No, you don’t.

Then why are we so tough on our kids when they show the slightest weakness or fault? Why are we so tough on our spouse or friend or relative?

Why do we expect perfection of them when nobody in the world is perfect including you? Why don’t we be forgiving?

Humility is recognizing that no one is perfect. Colossians 3:13 *“You must make allowances for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you so you must forgive others.”*

Notice the motivation: You have been forgiven, you have been shown grace, you better be gracious to other people. Cut them some slack. Allow them to be human.

Ephesians 4:2 *“Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other making allowances for each other’s faults because of your love.”* 1 Corinthians 13:7 (New Jerusalem Bible) *“Love is always ready to make allowances.”* That’s the

loving thing. It's unloving to hold people to a standard that even you can't keep.

We come to step five and God turns up the heat a little bit more and requires a little bit more humility to do this.

5. ADJUST TO THEIR NEEDS.

If you want to rebuild a relationship, you adjust to their needs. This takes humility to a level deeper than most of us go to. It's one thing to understand someone else's needs, it's another thing to recognize their differences. It's another thing to affirm their needs and say they're legitimate. But it takes massive amount of humility to adjust to their needs. Most of the time I don't want to adjust to your needs, I want you to adjust to my needs. The Bible says in Philippians 2:4 *"Look out for one another's interest not just your own."* The truth is, we always want everybody to adjust to us. But the Bible says do the opposite. In fact the Bible is very blunt. Romans 15:2 *"We should please others. If we do what helps them we will build them up in the Lord."* This truth is all through the New Testament. The Bible tells us in Galatians 5:13 *"Don't use your freedom just to do whatever you want to do, what pleases you, but rather serve one another in love."* That is adjusting to other people's needs.

Then we come to the sixth step and this is the clincher. This is the one that stops us dead cold. This is the ultimate example of love, the ultimate example of humility. It's... being like Jesus.

I'm going to tell you before I give it to you that you can't do this one on your own. You need God's power. You can't do it on your own.

6 ABANDON MY OWN RIGHTS.

The Bible is very clear than on a society level, we are to fight for the rights of other people. But on a personal level, God has a whole different ethic. God says on a personal level, “Yield your rights to Me. Give them up to Me.”

Perhaps there is someone here who is not a Christian yet. Perhaps you’re thinking of taking that step. So I want to explain to you right up front what happens when you become a follower of Christ. When you become a follower of Christ, you participate in an exchange. Jesus Christ gave His life for you on the cross so you could have your sins in the past forgiven, a purpose for living and a home in heaven. A pretty good deal. Now when you become a follower of Christ, you give your life to Him in return. You commit your life completely to Christ. You give up your rights to yourself and let Jesus take charge of your life. He becomes your Lord, your Master. He is your King and you are his servant. You do the bidding of the King. You give up your rights.

This has profound implications in your life. Many people never get to this level of maturity realizing that everything belongs to God. You just get to use it for a while. That means the car I drive is not mine. It’s God’s car. So if somebody bumps into it and dents the fender God’s got a problem. Because it’s God’s car.

That’s a reason for action but it’s not a reason for anger because it’s not my car. So what I need to do is give ownership of everything to God. I yield my rights to Him.

Anytime you get angry, that is a warning light to you that you’re taking back your rights. You say, “But I deserve this!” instead of giving it to God.

In our hearts some of our rights are legitimate and some of them, frankly, are ludicrous. Imaginary. Like, “I have a right to a problem-free life!” So if things don’t turn out the way I want them and I have difficulties or my kids get sick, I get mad at God.

Some of you have got mad at God because you think, “I have a right for my loved ones to live as long as I’m alive.” And they didn’t. And somebody you loved died and you got mad at God. Ted Turner, the billionaire-owner of CNN, was planning to be a missionary when he was a teenager. Then his younger sister whom he loved dearly, developed a rare form of lupus she never recovered from and after years of praying for her, she passed away. Turner got angry with God. He said in an interview, “It just seemed so unfair, because she hadn't done anything wrong. What had she done wrong?” Eventually, he gave up his faith and set his sight to becoming a success in the world. Perhaps, it was his way of saying, “You let me down, God. I have the right to live my own life.”

We often think we have a right to presume on the will of God. What we do is want something really bad and we pray for it. And because we pray for it, we assume that it is God’s will. Then when it doesn’t come or it is delayed, we get mad at God. We’re presuming on the will of God. We do this all the time.

Relationally, rights will get you into all kinds of trouble. I know of a guy who said one time, “I have a right to a beautiful wife.” That was his excuse for leaving his older wife to marry some younger bimbo.”

Some say, “I have a right to be pretty but I’m not pretty, so I’m mad at God... I have a right to be athletic but I’m not athletic so I’m mad at God.”

Listen, the reason you're mad at God and you're mad at other people is you're holding back on things that really belong to God. Here's the amazing thing. When you give your rights to God, He becomes the defender and the fulfiller of those rights.

Who can do a better job of defending you, you or God? Who can do a better job of fulfilling your needs, you or God?

This issue is so fundamental, it is the cause of most marital breakdowns.

1 Corinthians 7:4 *"Marriage is not a place to stand up for your rights.*

Marriage is a decision to serve the other." If you got married to have all your needs met, you got married for the wrong reason. You need to confess it and ask for forgiveness. Marriage is a decision to serve somebody, to put their needs out there ahead of your own. That's the way God means for it to be.

Of course, the ultimate example of this is our Lord Jesus Christ. The supreme model of yielding rights is Jesus. *"Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not demand and cling to His rights as God. [I have my rights!] Instead of this of His own free will, He gave up all He had and took the nature of a servant."*

Jesus Christ is God. He created everything. He has a right to be worshipped. Yet He gave up His rights, came to earth like one of us and allowed Himself to be humiliated, to be mocked, to be spit on, to be beaten forty times with a whip, a crown of thorns put down on His head, to have His arms stretched out on a cross and nailed and have His feet nailed and to hang there in shame, suffering a brutal death. He gave up His right when He allowed the crowd to choose Barabbas, a common criminal over Himself. Why would anybody do that? Love. He loved you that much.

So He gave up His position in heaven to come to earth, to die for you, to say, “This is how much you matter. This is how much I care for you. This is how much I have a plan for your life. I’m willing to give it all up and humble Myself and take even the death on a cross.” He did it out of love. He is our model. He is our example.

These are the six levels of humility. How do you rate yourself? How deep does your humility go? Are you stuck on Level One or Two or Three? What step are you stalled at? Question: What’s your next step in growing to maturity?

Let me be honest with you, to take these steps to restore relationship you’re going to need two things. You’re going to need endurance and you’re going to need encouragement. You didn’t get into your relational mess overnight. You’re not going to get out of it overnight. It isn’t solved – bam! – just like that. There’s going to be some tough work ahead, some honesty, some tears, some pain, some restoration, some confession, some forgiveness, some working through issues, some learning and growing and maturing. It’s tough to build strong, healthy relationships. That’s why there are so few really good relationships in the world. So you’re going to need encouragement. You’re going to need endurance to build the good relationships in your life. Where in the world do you get that?

“May God, who gives endurance and encouragement, allow you to live in harmony with each other by following the example of Jesus Christ who gave up His rights.”