

Fil-Am Church
Family Camp Westmoreland State Oark
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
Sunday's Service
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**Bridging the Gap Between Me and Other People
(How to Improve My Relationships)**

On June 1, 2005, Percy Arrowsmith, 105-years-old, and his 100-year-old wife Florence celebrated their 80th wedding anniversary – Percy died two weeks later. They met at their church in Hereford, England. He sang in the choir, and she was a Sunday school teacher.

According to the Guinness World Record authorities, the couple held the record for the longest marriage, as well as the oldest aggregate age of a married couple. The Arrowsmiths claimed the key to their long marriage was not to go to sleep on an argument. They always kissed each other and held hands each night before going to bed.

Now contrast that lovely story with the following:

A man from Berlin, Germany, took an unusual approach in trying to bring peace to his marriage. CNN reported that the man was using an old air raid siren to stun his wife into submission. "My wife never lets me get a word in edgeways," the man identified as Vladimir R. told the police. "So I crank up the siren and let it rip for a few minutes. It works every time. Afterwards, it's real quiet again."

The 73-year-old man's 220-volt rooftop siren was confiscated by police after neighbors filed complaints. As for his wife of 32 years, she said "My husband is a stubborn mule, so I have to get loud."

Why is it that some relationships can run smoothly, even during difficult times, while others seem to be in conflict mode at all times and all seasons? And I'm not just talking about marital relationships, but relationships with our kids, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and relatives.

For some reason, many of us just don't seem to be able to get along with others. The fact is, our lives are full of people we don't like.

We don't like the way people act, the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they smell. We don't like some people. Most of all, we don't like people who don't like us. Winston Churchill and Lady Astor had a famous rivalry going on. One day Lady Astor said, "If I were your wife I'd put arsenic in your beer." Churchill said, "If you were my wife, I'd drink it." The rest of the story goes like this: Lady Astor told Prime Minister Churchill, "You are quite drunk." Churchill replied, "I may be quite drunk. However, you are quite ugly. And I will be sober in the morning."

This morning, we're going to see how the Bible can help us in our relationships. Thankfully, the Bible gives us some instruction that will help us to have good relations with just about anybody. I've taken the word RELATE and made an acrostic to help us remember what the Bible has to say about this matter – Let's start with "R."

First of all, no matter who we are dealing with, we need to...

RESPECT THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE

I'm sure you all remember Rodney Dangerfield – he made a living talking about how little respect he got. "I tell ya I get no respect from anyone. I bought a cemetery plot. The guy said, "There goes the neighborhood!" "Last week I told my psychiatrist, 'I keep thinking about suicide.' He told me to pay in advance."

"My uncle's dying wish, he wanted me on his lap. He was in the electric chair."

"I could tell that my parents hated me. My bath toys were a toaster and a radio."

"I remember I was so depressed I was going to jump out a window on the tenth floor, so they sent a priest to talk to me. He said, "On your mark. Obviously Rodney was exaggerating, if not downright lying, but the truth of the matter is that we have lost the value of respecting others in our culture. We have forgotten how to respect the elderly, our spouses, our employers, and just about everybody else.

Yet the Bible tell us this: *Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God, and respect the king.* – 1 Peter 2:17 (NLT)

Have you ever paid close attention to Jesus' ministry and noticed how respectful he was, especially of people that no one else respected? He went out of His way to show love and respect to prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, the poor and others that society had rejected. And by showing them His respect, He was able to very quickly gain their respect in return, and start down the road to building healthy relationships.

If you are disrespectful of your spouse, or your children, or your parents, you are simply asking for a troubled relationship. But the Bible teaches us that if we begin treating others the way we would like to be treated, we will be fulfilling God's law. *"Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."* – Matthew 7:12 (NLT)

If we begin here, we'll be well on our way to building healthy relationships.

ENGAGE THEIR MIND AND HEART

In many ways this goes along with showing respect, but it is showing respect in a way that lets people know that you care about them and what they think. It is speaking to them in such a way that they know that you value them. I'm not talking about sucking up to someone else, I'm talking about showing a real interest in them.

For instance, once Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the well and the following dialogue ensued: *"A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink."... the woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."* – John 4:7-10 (NLT)

Now this becomes an opening whereby Jesus is able to not only teach her of the love that God has for her, but also demonstrates to her that He is interested in her as an individual person.

Or take the account of when the little children were brought to Jesus:
“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

But Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.’ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.” – Matthew 19:13-15 (NLT)

Now what effect did Jesus’ words and actions have on those children, as well as on their parents? I’m sure that it was a demonstration of the warmth and comfort that they could receive through a relationship with Jesus.

If we want to have solid relationships with our spouse, children, co-workers, as well as unchurched people, we need to let them know that we are interested in them as individuals and not take them for granted. We want everyone to know that we care about them / and we do that / by engaging their minds and hearts. They need to know that we care about how they feel, what they think about any given subject, and how we can help them reach their goals in life. It is looking out for the other person’s interests in this manner that will help you to grow solid relationships that will never go away.

LOVE THEM UNCONDITIONALLY

This is probably one of the most difficult things that we are called to do.

To love unconditionally means that my love for a person will remain no matter what they do, what they say, or whether they agree with me or not. To love unconditionally / does not mean I have to approve of everything the other person does or says...just that my love for them will not waver.

For instance, your husband forgets to kiss you goodbye in the morning as he goes to work, but instead of pouting and sulking over it, you still cook him the best pork chop for dinner. And you know he has high cholesterol. The point is, it does not affect the level of love that you have for the person. Whatever their attitude toward you.

You know, the perfect example of this is the love that God has for us even though many times we have turned against Him and openly sinned. I mean, can you think of anything that you have done or said in your life that would have been displeasing to God? I certainly can. Yet God still offered His Son as a love gift to us – not because we had earned it, and not because we were living lives that He approved of – but simply because His love for us is without condition. *“God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. – Romans 5:8 (NLT)*

I want you to notice that last phrase – “while we were still sinners.” God didn’t wait for you to get your act together – He didn’t lay down any requirements whatsoever before He offered you His love. His love was and is given to those who hate Him, to those who mock Him, to those who teach others to turn away from Him – God’s love is offered without condition.

Now when we consider the great example that God has shown us of unconditional love, shouldn’t we show that same type of love toward others? It is easy to love other people when they love us back, but it is quite another

thing to love those who are unlovable. *"Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that!"* – Luke 6:32 (NLT)

What God is asking us to do is to love that rebellious child, to love that wayward spouse, and to love that business partner who has cheated us. And get this, to love those who hurt us so much. How do you love them? How do you show you love them? By forgiving them.

Let me show you a video about this very thing I'm talking about.

Video: Matthew West: Forgiveness

Now is loving others despite themselves easy? Of course not! But it is what is necessary if we are going to build godly relationships. *"Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law."* – Romans 13:8

APPROACH GOD ON THEIR BEHALF

In the magazine Christian Parenting Today, Elisa Morgan told this story about her daughter: One night my 11-year-old daughter Eva noticed I was distracted as I tucked her in to bed. I told her about a friend's teenage daughter whose hair was mysteriously falling out and I encouraged Eva to pray for Amy. Her simple words, "Jesus, please hold Amy's hair on her head," touched me.

As the doctors experimented with different treatments, Amy continued to lose her hair – Eva continued to pray the same prayer. After six

weeks the doctors determined Amy had an extremely rare disorder where hair loss is unpredictable but can be complete and permanent. When I told Eva, she took my hand and closed her eyes. This time her prayer was different. "Dear Jesus, if you won't hold Amy's hair on her head, would you please hold Amy?" Tearfully, I realized how sometimes God doesn't move mountains; he moves us.

"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks." – 1 Timothy 2:1

There is nothing that makes a person feel better than knowing that you are praying on their behalf.

The purpose in doing this isn't to build relationships, but that is a side benefit. We pray for others because we care about them, and when we show that we care, the relationship is solidified.

I cannot tell you of one day that I haven't prayed for every member of my immediate family, as well as for many of you. Whether it is for healing, safety, or for spiritual issues, I feel a need to lift you before God in prayer, and I hope that you do the same for me. It is in connecting with God for others that we build a bond beyond what is seen and heard – a bond that resides in the heavenly realms.

TAKE WHATEVER TIME IS NECESSARY

Earlier we looked at Jesus' response to the children who were brought to Him. The disciples said, "Don't bother Him," but Jesus told them to come. Similar events were repeated many times over in the life of Jesus. He was willing to spend the time necessary to minister to others. I think we really

need to stop and think about this one – are we giving enough time to our family, to our friends, and to our fellow church members to build healthy relationships with them?

I know of married couples that complain because they've grown apart – they say they don't know each other anymore – they also spend only about an hour a week together, if that. The same could be said concerning the time we spend with our kids. When someone is important to us we are willing to spend whatever time is necessary to build a relationship with them. When we are not willing to spend the time necessary, they recognize that fact, and they also walk away realizing that they are not a priority in our life.

How much time is necessary? It depends on the situation – but there is no doubt for most of us that a whole lot more time is needed than we are presently devoting to the most important people in our lives.

Of course, it doesn't have to stay that way – the cure for this is simple, but you and I have to make a decision to change, and then follow through with it.

ENCOURAGE THEM ALWAYS

This is perhaps the most important thing that we can do – we also need to accompany our actions with words that will lift others up. The Bible says, *“Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”* (Eph. 4:29)

Are we careful with our words? Do we think twice or thrice or many times before we say something that may hurt someone? Many relationships

had gone sour because of words that shouldn't have been said. We get ourselves into so much trouble at what we say. James chapter 3 gives several illustrations. He says our tongue is like a rudder, a bit in a horse's mouth, a spark, a snake, a spring. He says that you put a little bit in a horse's mouth and that little bit can control the direction of the horse. A little rudder on a boat can control the direction of the boat. Your tongue, which, by size is very insignificant, controls your life. What you say directs your life, what you say can destroy your life. It can delight people's lives, it can discourage people's lives. Your tongue is a powerful force for good or for evil.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I just say what's on my mind." They're kind of proud of it. Being frank, up front, they say what's on their mind. Maybe there's not a whole lot on their mind. Maybe what's on their mind shouldn't be said. The Bible says that that's not frankness, that's immaturity. A lot of people just need a large dose of tactfulness.

Encourage, don't disparage. Empathize, don't criticize. Watch what you say. When you talk you don't just say things to build yourself up. You say things to build other people up. If it doesn't build somebody else up, don't say it. Even if it's the truth. If it doesn't build up, don't say it.

And let me tell you, encouraging with your words is a sure-fire way of building a relationship. In fact, that's how lovers start a relationship, right? They compliment each other, they build each other up. Sadly, some relationships take a different turn after a while. No more encouraging words, only discouraging words.

So folks, it helps a great deal in building relationships when we compliment, when we encourage people with our words.

In summary, if we want to bridge the gap between ourselves and other people, let's remember these principles:

RESPECT THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE

ENGAGE THEIR MIND AND HEART

LOVE THEM UNCONDITIONALLY

APPROACH GOD ON THEIR BEHALF

TAKE WHATEVER TIME IS NECESSARY

ENCOURAGE THEM ALWAYS

If you'll do these things, you will find all of your relationships will begin coming together in ways you've only dreamed of before.

Let us pray....