

God's Promise of Healthy Relationships

1 Peter 4:8-11

Good morning! We're on the sixth part of our series on "God's Awesome Promises to You". Today, I'm going to talk about "God's Promise of Healthy Relationships". And I'm going to speak from 1 Peter 4:8-11. (Read)

A popular saying goes, "No man is an island." Those words come from a devotion written by John Donne, a preacher who was the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London from 1621-1631. It is saying that human beings are connected to each other, and connection to one another is important for the well-being and survival of any individual.

Donne was a preacher, and he knew what he was talking about. He knew that God has designed human beings to be in a relationship. That's what the Bible says. In fact, in the very beginning, God created man and woman, Adam and Eve. God knew that Adam will not flourish as a human being if his relationship was only with animals. He cannot have a meaningful dialogue with an animal, right? So, he gave him Eve. Eve was the perfect companion for him. She was the perfect partner. They were living in paradise. Things were going well, their relationship was going strong until...they sinned. Sin marred their relationship. And it has been like that ever since for the rest of mankind down through the centuries.

Now, I'm talking not only about marriage relationships, but relationships in general. I think you'll agree with me when I say that there are no perfect relationships. Parents and children can grow apart, friends can betray each other, office workers can be envious of each other, churchmates can hurt each other, and so on. Why is that? Because relationships involve people and people are imperfect.

Truth is, we don't want any problems in our relationships. We don't want troubles in our relationships. Because they cause stress and anxiety. Stress is good, of course, if it will make you become better. But stress is not good if it will make you bitter. And a lot of people are bitter because of a relationship that turned sour. Probably, they have been belittled or looked down upon by someone. Maybe, they were hurt by the action or an insensitive word from someone. Or they have been ignored or treated harshly.

People hurt us. We hurt other people, too. Sometimes unintentionally, sometimes intentionally. As someone said, hurt people hurt people. What can break this cycle? What can improve our relationships? You see, God wants us live peacefully with one another. The Bible says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18)

Now, all these verses from 1 Peter we're considering this morning, they all apply to Christians. This letter was written by Peter to the early Christians. He was encouraging them. He was telling them how to treat each other, how to be good followers of Jesus, how to shine in a dark world. For they were living in a dark world, when the Roman Empire was enforcing its will upon the people. During that time, the Roman Empire was characterized by paganism, idolatry, corruption, materialism, persecution, and other evil things – and Peter was telling his fellow Christians to be different from those around them.

We're also living in a dark world at present. Not only because of the death and suffering we're seeing due to the pandemic but because of the immorality and corruption we're seeing in all levels of society. Our world is not much different from the world of Peter. It might even be worse.

And so, these are all principles to be applied by Christians today. We should be treating other Christians the way Peter wants us to treat each other but in the same token we should be applying these as well to our relationships with people who are not Christians. They have implications and an application for us today.

In view of that, today, I'd like to share with you a few things you can do to have healthy relationships. Relationships that will not drain you, but relationships that will fill you. In the verses we read earlier, it is implicit that God promises our relationships will be healthy if we will heed his advice. God cares for us so much and he wants our relationships to be as trouble-free as possible. So, if we keep these principles in mind, God promises us this will strengthen our relationships.

The very first thing we can do to make our relationships healthy is this:

1. Love others deeply.

Verse 8 says, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

By saying "above all", Peter places the highest priority on loving one another. It should be pre-eminent and prominent. That's why it's first on his list.

Peter knew what he was talking about. He was the recipient of a love that was so deep and covered his many sins. That love came from his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Peter was a man known for his impatience and recklessness. He was impulsive that he did things and said things he regretted later on. I imagine him creating a lot of enemies because of his rough personality before he became a Christian and I guess even after he became a Christian. Of course, in time, his attitude changed and became a better person.

Anyway, as we know, the worst sin he committed was when he denied his Lord three times. That truly exposed his recklessness. He was hasty and did not think about the consequences. As a result, he wept bitterly and grieved deeply. In fact, he went back to fishing after Jesus died thinking that he no longer was useful.

But after his resurrection, Jesus showed his deep love for him by forgiving him and restoring him to his calling of taking care of the church. Despite his many sins, Jesus showed great love to him.

Peter is encouraging us to love one another deeply as well. The kind of deep love that Jesus showed to him. A kind of love that will forgive someone no matter how many times that person has hurt you. If you remember, Peter was the one who asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21) Maybe he asked that because he was bitter. Someone kept hurting him. He was Bitter Peter. But Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” In short, you have to have a long patience. And you have to forgive every time. There has to be no conditions.

This is the characteristic of deep love. It is a love that openly reaches out and goes the extra distance. It is a love that glosses over the faults of others. It is unwilling to hold others’ faults against them. Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.”

If you want to have a healthy relationship, let go of all that bitterness in your heart. I know it’s hard but you don’t do it on your own power. You ask God to make you love others deeply.

It’s just like the time when Corrie Ten Boom came face to face with one of his captors a couple of years after the end of WW II. It was 1947 and she had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. She spoke at a church. After she spoke, a man slowly walked to her and she immediately recognized him. He was a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where she and her sister were sent. Suddenly, painful memories of the past came rushing to her mind.

When the man was in front of her, he thrust his hand out: “A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

Corrie fumbled in her pocketbook rather than take that hand. It was the first time since her release that she had been face to face with one of her captors and her blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,” he said. “I was a guard in there.” He continued, “But since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein”—again the hand came out—“will you forgive me?”

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to her it seemed hours as she wrestled with the most difficult thing she had ever had to do. But she knew that forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Jesus, help me!” she prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, she thrust her hand into the one stretched out to her. And as she did, an incredible thing took place. She said that a current started in her shoulder, raced down her arm, sprang into their joined hands. And then a healing warmth seemed to flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” she cried. “With all my heart!”

Love others deeply. The second thing you do is

2. **Welcome others sincerely.**

Verse 9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

Hospitality comes from the Greek word “**philoxenia**” which literally means “**one who loves strangers**”. There’s that word “love” again. Peter here is now talking about love in action.

You can love someone deep in your heart by forgiving them. And take that love to another dimension by expressing it through your action. Paul says this also about hospitality, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (Romans 12:13). Some translations say it this way—Pursue hospitality. Not just “practice” hospitality, but diligently “pursue” philoxenia—the love of strangers, which is biblical hospitality.

I remember years ago, I was new here in the States. It was my first year in fact. I was living in California back then with my sister and her family. Then, I found a job in New Jersey. So, I flew to New Jersey and found a basement apartment in Jersey City. I attended a Bible study and came to know a couple. When they learned that I was by myself, they offered one of their bedrooms to me. I was surprised by their kindness because they really didn’t know my background. I was surprised even more because they didn’t even ask me to pay for the bedroom. So, I gladly moved to their place and we became close friends afterwards. After a year, when my grandma in California joined me in New Jersey, my new friends also accommodated my grandma. They treated my grandma well and even bought an electric fan for her. Still, they didn’t ask me to pay. Then, my mom wanted to join me in Jersey City, too. So, she came and now there were three of us. And that’s when I decided to move to our own apartment.

That is an example of real hospitable Christians.

Now, Peter says do it without grumbling. That’s crucial because it is all too easy to open your home only to those who are your close personal friends. Peter isn’t talking about having your pals over for a game night. That’s good and you ought to do it, but Peter isn’t thinking about that. He’s thinking about those times when you show kindness to people you don’t know very well. How easy it is in those cases to mumble and grumble and gripe under your breath. And when you do that, you miss the blessing God wants you to receive.

We've all done that. We meet some new people and say, "Drop by any time." So one night we're eating supper and a knock comes at the door. Who can it be? We open the door and it's those new people—standing on the porch with big smiles. So what do we do? We smile right back and say, "Good to see you. Come on in." But in reality we hope that they'll leave soon.

God knows whether we mean it or not. We aren't fooling him a bit. That's why Peter says our hospitality must be done without grumbling.

To enjoy healthy relationships, love others deeply and welcome others sincerely. The third thing you do is

3. Serve others wisely.

Verse 10 says, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

Serving others will go a long way to truly develop and enhance a relationship. By serving others, we're letting people know that we care for them, we're attentive to their needs, and they are important to us. That's why people flocked to Jesus when he was on earth. He served them. He gave them food to eat. He healed the sick. He cured the lepers. He drove out demons. He taught them. He did a lot of things for people.

Now, we cannot do all those things obviously but Jesus wants us to serve others in our own little way according to the gifts he has given us.

The question for you this afternoon is what gifts has the Lord given you? It is difficult sometimes to determine the areas in which we are gifted. The truth is many of us may be gifted in more than one way, but we all are gifted differently. I believe that we can determine how we are gifted. In our church, we have Class 301 wherein this is taught. So we have no excuse for not using our gifts. It is not an excuse to say, "I have no gifts" because God has given each Christian a gift.

Romans 12:6-8 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Some of the other gifts are mentioned in different parts of the Bible like in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and Ephesians 4:11.

What I want to stress here is that whatever gift God has endowed us with, we must put it to use. After all, we are stewards of God’s grace. A steward is someone who wisely manages and uses the resources that have been given him. So, we should ask ourselves, am I faithfully managing and utilizing the gifts of God? If you’re a Christian, you’re a part of the body of Christ and your gift is essential in building up others and in growing the church.

I thank God for all people at Fil-Am, you know who you are, who are using their gifts and are allowing themselves to be used by God so that others will be blessed and this church will grow. Hebrews 10:24 tells us, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” I believe our gift can be used toward this purpose.

Our gifts are an extension of God’s grace. Each gift is a grace of God that is supposed to benefit others. That’s why when we use our gifts, God’s blessing is flowing to others through us.

To enjoy healthy relationships, love others deeply, be hospitable sincerely, and serve others wisely. The fourth and final thing you do is

4. **Speak truthfully and in a godly manner.**

Verse 11 says, “If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.”

I've consulted several commentaries on this verse and they say that this could mean either the gift of teaching or just plain talking or speaking to another person. Well, you can take either position or both positions. The bottom line is this and I think this is what Peter is trying to point out. Whatever is coming out of your mouth, it should be something that is godly, or righteous. Meaning, if you're going to teach, make sure that you're teaching the truth from God's Word. It should be biblical and centers on Jesus. Many cults or pseudo-Christian religions claim they speak the Word of God. They use beautiful language and apply man's logic to twist the truth. I was deceived once, twice, thrice, you know, having been involved in various religions and Christian cults. In the end, God was gracious to me and set me free by the truth of his word.

Then, also, if you're speaking to someone on a personal level, please speak gently and lovingly. Our words can hurt. The tongue can be an instrument to give life or a weapon to destroy. It can encourage or discourage depending on the way it is used. Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death." And James says, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing." (James 3:9-10)

Let's be careful in using our tongues. Two helpful verses that will remind us to be prudent when we speak are Colossians 4:6 which says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." And Ephesians 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

So, let's ask ourselves, "Do I speak the truth or do I lie? Do I say encouraging words or do I say words that discourage others or belittle or demean others?"

One thing I'm sure of, the way we communicate will determine whether the relationship will be healthy or not, whether it will continue or not, whether it will grow or die.

Now, Peter reminds us that we will need God's help as we apply all these principles in our dealings with other people. He says, "If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides" (v. 11b). When he mentions serves, he means all the things we do for others. So, as we love others, as we practice hospitality, as we serve, and as we speak, let's be aware that we cannot do it on our own. We are dependent on God always. We should ask for his help. Just like what Corrie Ten Boom did.

The end result is that God gets the glory because our good deeds will shine like a light before others. Matthew 5:16 says, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Friends, in the end, we do all these things not only to have a healthy relationship with others but to continue having a healthy relationship with the one who we owe our lives to, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who reached out to us first because he wants us to have a relationship with him. The Bible says that we are all selfish and we are all proud and we don't want God in our lives. We are all sinners and we deserve to die and be punished for our sins and be eternally condemned in hell. But God loves us so much the Bible says, that he sent his own Son, the Lord Jesus to die for our sins, to save us from our sins.

God wants to restore our relationship with him that our first parents lost when they sinned. He made a way for that relationship to be restored. And that's by the death of his son Jesus. Because he died, our sins are forgiven. That's the good news. And it gets better because if we repent of our sins and acknowledge that Jesus died for our sins, then he'll give us eternal life.

You see, Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. When he rose again, he defeated sin and death forever. Therefore, those who believe in him, will also rise from the dead and be with Jesus in heaven forever.

If you're a follower of Jesus, I'm glad you have a relationship with him. If you don't have a relationship with him yet, I'd like to give you an opportunity to start a relationship with Jesus.

Let us bow our heads and close our eyes.