

Telling the Truth

The Relationship Initiative, February 3 & 4, 2024 (Communion) | Genesis 2:18-25

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Why are we doing a sermon series on relationships?

In 2018 the British Prime Minister appointed the world's first Minister of Loneliness.

Tracey Crouch was the first Minister of Loneliness.

She knew a thing or two about loneliness, as she had experienced a profound sense of loneliness after the birth of her first child two year earlier.

She had also experienced an even darker season when she became a Member of Parliament, because it is actually easy to feel totally alone even when you are surrounded by people.

We can be incredibly lonely even in a crowded room.

Studies had shown that even before the pandemic, loneliness was surging as a problem.

Tracey Crouch was tasked with addressing it.¹

We are struggling to build healthy, life-giving relationships.

This is the transcript of a call to the UK Ministry of Loneliness:

I think that the thing about being lonely is that it makes it feel like no one really knows you and that, you know, if you disappeared, just slipped away there'd be no real record of who you were. I think that maybe I self-harm because I want it to be recorded, this, sort of, pain inside that takes so much, so much of my time, and I want it to be shown physically. I just want to see it so it's not only in my head.²

That's one person saying how difficult it can be to build healthy, life-giving relationships.

We need skills to build healthy, life-giving relationships.

We WANT our relationships to be healthy and life-giving.

It turns out that we NEED our relationships to be healthy and life-giving.

Consequently, we WANT to build healthy, life-giving relationships.

We NEED to build healthy, life-giving relationships.

But to do that takes skill and intentionality.

The Bible has a lot to say about the skills that we need to build those healthy, life-giving relationships, so we are going to dig into what the Bible actually says on this topic.

We need to tell the truth about ourselves if we are going to have healthy, life-giving relationships.

There are many myths that circulate about healthy, life-giving relationships.

¹ <https://time.com/5248016/tracey-crouch-uk-loneliness-minister/>

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/610768/cancellation-sxsw/>

Some of us have heard that we DON'T need relationships.

Some of us have lived with some natural FEAR of relationships. We either lack confidence in our relational skills, or we have been hurt in the past and are now afraid of being hurt again, so we have convinced ourselves that we are better off alone or with a very small circle around us.

We begin today with perhaps the most important skill we will get for building healthy, life-giving relationships, and that is telling the truth.

When you hear me say that we need to tell the truth, you may think that I mean we need to speak truth to the people around us. Actually, I mean that we need to tell ourselves the truth about relationships and about what the Bible says about relationships.

We need relationships.

Can you believe that, in creating, God said, "It is not good?"

In Genesis chapter one, we read the account of God's creating the heavens and the earth.

Repeatedly, God said that what he created was "good."

Then in Genesis chapter two, we get additional details about how God created human beings. He created "the man" from the dirt. He shaped "the man" and breathed his own breath into him, and he became a living being.

Then in Genesis 2:18 we read that "It is not good."

The man is alone, and that is not good.

That doesn't mean that God made a mistake; it means that God is not done creating.

A human being is not complete when that human being is alone. Why?

Human beings are created in God's image.

Look at **Genesis 1:26-27**:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

There is a lot of theology packed into that tiny passage. We can't cover it all today.

However, notice that God says that he is creating humanity in his own image. Human beings are created in God's image. We bear the image of God.

What does that mean? It simply means that we are created in some ways like our Creator! We are not like God in every way, nor are we like God in just one way. God's image is like an imprint on us.

Among the things that we know about God is the fact that God is Triune. He is one being in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is inherently relational.

One of the ways in which we bear the image of God is that we too are inherently relational.

So when "the man" was alone, that was not good. It wasn't complete.

No suitable partner for "the man" could be found in creation.

God brought every living creature before the man, but no suitable partner was found.

Why? Only another image bearer would do for a partner.

So, God created woman, another image bearer to be a partner for the man.

Look at the profoundly relational world God created in the beginning.

We have already seen in Genesis 2, and we will get a brief glimpse in Genesis 3 of the deeply personal, face-to-face relationship God had with the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. God walked in the garden regularly and spoke with them personally.

Here at the end of Genesis 2, we find what the first human relationships looked like. The man and the woman were together and loved one another purely.

The text says that they were naked. The first human beings were unprotected. They had no need to protect themselves from each other, from God, or from their world.

Why? There was no shame. There was no guilt to produce shame.

That is the most accurate picture of human nature in its purest form.

That's who God created us to be and what God created us to enjoy.

We were created for relationships. We need relationships.

Sin broke our most important relationships.

Sin broke our relationship with God.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned against God, and the consequences were immediate.

Adam and Eve had guilt, they felt shame, and they hid from God's presence.

Later, God sent them out of the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:24 reads:

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Human beings were no longer given access in the same way to the presence of God.

Sin broke our relationship with God.

Sin broke our relationships with each other.

Immediately after they sinned, Adam and Eve realized they were naked. Sin brought guilt, which brought shame, and that easy, unprotected relationship was no longer possible.

Worse, we quickly see what was taking root in the human heart.

Adam and Eve had two children, Cain and Abel.

When the children grew up, they got into a dispute.

In **Genesis 4:8** we read:

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

This murder is more significant than it seems. It shows us the condition of human relationships after the Fall. Sin broke our relationships with each other.

Sin broke us such that broken stuff comes out of us naturally.

In the New Testament, Paul speaks about the flesh. When Paul talks about “the flesh,” he isn’t normally talking about the human condition. He is talking about our fallen condition.

In **Galatians 5:19-21** he talks about the works of the flesh:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. ...

There are “big sins” in this list. But look at the core of these works of the flesh. It’s things like enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. Broken stuff comes out of us naturally since we are fallen and broken, and it ruins our relationships.

Sin is still breaking our most important relationships.

We read in multiple places that the fabric of our social relationships is unraveling.

A recent surgeon general’s warning is based on an extensive study of our social connections. The surgeon general found broad evidence over twenty years that our social connections are coming apart. This infographic tells the story.

Between 2003 and 2020, we started spending more time alone.

We also dramatically decreased the amount of time we spend together.³

Sin is still breaking our relationships, and the damage seems to be getting worse quickly.

However, sin does not have the last word on us.

Faith in Jesus renews our capacity for relationships.

In Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family.

What a cure for loneliness!

When we accept forgiveness for our sins in Jesus, we are also adopted into God’s family.

Galatians 4:4-6 says:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

When we accept Jesus, we are adopted as sons and daughters of God.

That makes Jesus our older brother, and that makes us part of a very large spiritual family.

We are all, in a spiritual sense, brothers and sisters to each other.

That’s a major change in our capacity for relationships!

In Jesus, we are invited to abide in him.

Jesus actually makes it a command and a matter of spiritual life.

In **John 15:4** Jesus says:

³ Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

It’s important that we deal with the command to remain in Jesus and unpack what that means to our spiritual practices and to our obedience.

But for now, let’s look at the promise. If we are commanded to abide in or with Jesus, then that means that Jesus is with us and that we are with him.

Through God the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always present to and with us.

That, too, is a major change to our capacity for relationships!

In Jesus, we are given the Fruit of the Spirit.

Earlier we looked at what Paul wrote about the work of the flesh.

What he wrote about the work of the flesh is in the context of his encouragement that we live our lives in step with God’s Holy Spirit. As we live our lives in step with God’s Holy Spirit, God sanctifies us. He makes us entirely new creatures.

Then later in Galatians 5, Paul writes about the outcome of that sanctifying work. He describes it as fruit. When we do life in the Spirit, something new comes flowing out of us. In **Galatians 5:22-23** Paul tells us what comes out of us when we have the Holy Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Notice how relational the fruit of the Spirit is. We have godly love for one another. We are overflowing with joy. We have peace that is contagious. We have patience with one another. We are kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

That’s another major change in our capacity for relationships.

Tell yourself the truth about relationships; then take action.

We all need relationships.

In 2023, the surgeon general of the United States issued a warning about what happens when we do not have relationships in our lives.

Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. – Surgeon General of the United States⁴

The Surgeon General is telling us what the Bible has been telling us: we all need relationships.

I saw our need for relationships powerfully on my recent trip to the Middle East and North Africa.

This is a picture of me at a home somewhere in the region.

⁴ Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

You can tell we are about to enjoy a really amazing meal together. That's a giant dish of an amazing stuffing made basically from phyllo dough, vegetables, and chicken stock. It's covered in eggs and sliced almonds. There are two whole roasted chickens on top.

This is a celebration meal, and this dish was just one of many served at this meal.

In that country, they serve this meal when a new mom has a baby. It's a celebration, and it is packed with so many carbs that a new mom can start replenishing after giving birth.

Why such a big celebration for us?

The family we ate with that day has been rejected by the rest of their families since they converted to Christianity. Their family never comes to see them.

In their country, it is illegal for them to convert to Christianity, so they are harassed by the police.

Consequently, they are indoors with the blinds drawn every night by sundown.

They don't have guests outside of their little Christian community because it's not safe.

So, we are some of the few guests they will have this year.

That's why they were celebrating in such a big way. Time with us was precious. Time with their Christian friends is precious. **We all need relationships.**

It's time to tell ourselves the truth. So, set this fact firmly in your mind! And when you set this fact firmly in your mind, it is time to take action! Here are some ways to consider:

Put down devices and walk away from screens.

We are spending more and more time on our devices and in front of screens.

The time we give to devices and screens takes away time from relationships.

So put down your devices occasionally and walk away from your screens. You will be amazed at how you find your life freeing up for people.

Join a team.

Many people find it easier to build relationships and connections when there is a task.

The task provides reasons and ways to relate to each other.

The task also binds people together with shared work and shared memories.

Join a team here at Valley or through one of our local partners. You will build relationships with other Christians and find yourself encouraged by the relationships and by the work.

Take a Next Step; we can help.

If you're looking for a way to build a relationship, particularly a relationship with another Christian, consider having a Next Step conversation.

There are lots of ways that we can help you get into relationships with other Christians.

Just stop by Connect Point, talk with someone there, and they will sign you up for a Next Step conversation. Then you will have a menu of options to help you build relationships.

Get creative!

You probably have better ideas than I do for getting into relationships with other Christians.

What I am hoping and praying today is that you walk away from our time together having dispelled any myths you may believe that you are better off alone. Tell yourself the truth. You, like all of us, need relationships. You were created for relationships.

When you make your mind up to do something, nothing will stop you.