

Relationships – False beliefs which foil friendships

In preparing this material I once again found some sore places in my own life. Be prepared for God to prompt you on a few old wounds which need his healing touch!

Let the Holy Spirit open up what might be on a sensitive area. Maybe something deep-seated. It takes courage and some risk-taking to get healed up and learn the truth.

But it's your choice, whether to allow the Holy Spirit to come and bring healing & restoration or not. It's up to you.

False beliefs which foil friendships

I'm a friendly person. I'm generally pretty good with most people. I know how to make people feel at ease and trust me. I hope that is because I am trustworthy but I know some of it is because I am good at it – working with people.

Nevertheless, although in many ways I am a people person – I am also an introvert. Although I am good with people I find it draining – whereas Alison finds it replenishing.

And although I am friendly and have some good friends and am in great relationship with my family – part of the way I express myself in relationship comes out of anxiety and fear. There are some underlying false beliefs in the way I think which restrict my ability to grow good friendships.

False beliefs can arise from previous experiences which give rise to certain emotions which then lead us to settle into a pattern of thinking which in turn leads to a certain way of behaving.

Experience – Emotion – Beliefs - Behaviour

When I first started playing rugby I tackled all wrong – when I went into the tackle I allowed my head to go in front of the knees of the person I was tackling and I got knocked out and a black eye into the bargain.

My experience led me to believe that when I tackled it was going to hurt, I was going to get knocked out and end up disfigured. Yes I know, that explains my face.

It made me afraid.

However, the coach explained to me that if I tackled in a different way, with my head going behind the other player's knees I wouldn't necessarily suffer pain.

My belief system changed and I was able to carry on playing rugby.

God's original design

The creation account in Genesis makes it clear that God exists in relationship (the trinity) and that he created us to exist in relationship.

Genesis 1:26-27, "Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness" ... so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

It's "us" making "them". It's first person plural and third person plural both as the creator and as the created. Relationship is built in and assumed.

But then mankind disobeys God (remember the apple and the snake in Genesis chapter 3?), sin enters the world and false beliefs about relationships seep into our thinking.

False Beliefs

Genesis 3:8-10 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Adam & Eve had sinned, and as a result they were afraid. Their false belief about God led them to hide.

We have all sinned:

Romans 3:23, ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...

and therefore we are all susceptible to false beliefs.

If you have given your life to Jesus you will have experienced his forgiveness and will be in the process of learning the truth instead of the lies about God, being healed and behaving differently.

But we have all experienced bad things which impact the way we behave today.

Our past experience influences our current behaviour.

I was afraid to tackle until I learnt the right way to do it.

Adam & Eve were afraid because their relationship with their creator God had broken down.

In the course of life, from being a baby in the womb, to growing up as a child, to learning about friendships in the adult world ... we have all had mixed experiences and we have all become at least a little anxious as we approach relationships, we're careful, protecting ourselves.

- Some of you are thinking – don't I just know it. David, I'm terrified of relationships and I can list a million reasons why I screw up friendships.
- Others of you are thinking – it's not me David, it's them, everyone else. It's not my fear, it's theirs'.
- Still others of you are thinking – I don't have a problem making friends David, I'm not afraid or anxious, do you mind if I check FB whilst you are talking?

I'm not a psychologist, I'm a pastor. I'm teaching you what the bible says about believing the truth and the way the truth sets us free from false beliefs.

Ways of behaving which may reveal the underlying false beliefs

Let me hold up a mirror – see if you can see yourself in any of these ways of behaving. I see myself in several and indeed as you look at them you may well identify more than one to which you are prone. Some people tell me that they work their way through most of them over time. Others report back that different behaviours pop up in different situations with different groups of people. See what you think:

1. You wear a mask. You tend to distance the real you. You get uncomfortable when the conversation becomes too personal. You resort to lies or fabrication to spin a protective tale.
2. You step back from people who may be controlling types. You avoid closeness.
3. You choose to be alone (although actually preferring to be with others). Perhaps someone has called you a loner and the description stuck. You think of yourself as a bit of a loner.
4. You get cross when you're let down. In order to avoid the anger you tend to operate independently, you deny yourself relationships, you become overly self-controlled.
5. You indulge in solitary activities. In fact you allow yourself to be almost unfriendly. Pushing people away. I wonder, can you easily name three warm, good characteristics about yourself?
6. You stay independent and in control. You're a bit inclined to feel somewhat superior. So you take responsibility and end up controlling the situation. You rescue others, take care of them. They can't manage without you.
7. Maybe you are a perfectionist, working really hard to make people love you. You can't really relax with your friends in case they lose interest in you.
8. You find that you depend on others. That you become clingy. You find that you seek attention – trying to make people laugh or feel sorry for you. You are realising that

you are trying hard to be loved.

9. You avoid confrontation and suppress angry feelings. You are likely to leave problems unresolved.

10. You withdraw from relationships and sulk.

Which of these is a behaviour you recognise in yourself right now? What is the Holy Spirit pointing out to you?

These ways of behaving reveal false beliefs. These false beliefs emerge from a tide of emotions: fear and anxiety, anger, insecurity, shame.

We experienced these emotions when something went wrong at some point in a previous relationship – although we may not even know or remember the experience. Something broke and we got hurt and now we protect ourselves with beliefs which cripple us.

There may be an element of truth in these beliefs but without God's truth they become false beliefs which can wreck our ability to build friendships.

Here are some false beliefs. The sort of stuff that goes through our heads:

1. If people really knew me they would not like me.
So you make a mask – which you hope they will like. You spin a bit of a tale.
Maybe you were once told that you are not likeable, you were persistently criticised.
Or maybe you have done some stuff of which you are ashamed.
2. If someone comes too close I'll be trapped.
Perhaps you are or were emotionally bound too closely to someone, a parent or spouse perhaps. You may be living with the history of never having made an exit into adulthood.
3. Loving someone means inevitably losing them one day.
Maybe you have lost – or been in danger of losing someone close to you. And indeed, we all lose things and people – it's part of the fall, the brokenness of our human condition.

But this is what Jesus came to change. His resurrection from the dead demonstrated that God has the last say on separation and departures and that a new day of restoration will come.

4. Don't trust anyone, people are never there when you need them.
Were your parents absent at a needy point in your young life? Or have you been

badly let down?

5. I hurt people.

You push people away. You think you will hurt them and so you are even unfriendly. Then they are hurt which just proves the point.

In fact you may actually have hurt someone. So, now allow God to forgive you and show you how to put things to rights. Ask him to reveal to you some of the good stuff in you – because you probably don't like yourself very much. And no one has ever shown pride in you.

6. I don't need people. The relationship equivalent of anorexia.

C.S.Lewis, The Four Loves, "the illusory feeling that it is good for us to be alone is a bad spiritual symptom; just as lack of appetite is a bad medical symptom because we really do need food."

Genesis 2:18, It is not good for man to be alone.

7. If I put in lots of work, I will be loved.

You're popular. And you're overly helpful to everyone. Their success depends on you. Somewhere in your history you were ignored, someone else was preferred over you and so you have to work harder.

8. I am responsible for other people's happiness.

There may have been conflict, chaos, disorder in your life and you became a rescuer. And now you translate that emotional response into all your relationships – and often you end becoming controlling in those friendships.

The truth is that we are only responsible for our own happiness. And that we only find deep, true happiness when our relationship with our creator God is restored.

9. It is unbearable to be alone. The opposite of "it's good to be alone".

We all have unmet needs deep in us and most of us turn to others to find a way of having those needs met. But sometimes it goes too far and is too demanding and our friendship requires too much of the other person. This is leading to jealousy, possessiveness, and exclusive relationships.

10. Conflict is wrong, I must keep the peace at all costs.

How was conflict modelled for you – was it entirely suppressed in your household or was it violence and anger?

Avoiding conflict is dysfunctional in a relationship because key issues never get resolved and gradually erode a relationship. But conflict doesn't have to mean shouting and anger or the silent treatment. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to

disagree agreeably and resolve differences.

11. A real friend knows what you need and puts you first.

You somehow expect your friend or spouse to know what you are thinking and what your needs are. Men often complain that their wives seem to expect them to be mind-readers!

But in my house it is the other way around - I often assume Alison knows that I want us to do something but haven't told her and when she goes off and does something else I sulk.

Apart from being my sin, maybe it has roots in being the eldest child – my parents no longer seem to know what I need now that there are all these sprogs around.

If that false belief takes root you will find yourself withdrawing from relationships, sulking, feeling let down, forgiving reluctantly.

Summary

Our experiences lead us into certain emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, insecurity and shame. When we are afraid or shamed, we hide. These emotions lead us into false beliefs which in turn direct us to behave in ways which make it difficult to form good friendships.

The church, with all its faults, offers two things to bring healing and restoration:

1. **Truth** – the truth of the gospel. God loves you passionately, Jesus died to save you from your sins and the Holy Spirit lives in you transform you into a new person. You can learn the truth from Him and start operating out of healthy beliefs.
2. **Community** – we learn the truth but to start with we still fear rejection and disapproval. We need somewhere safe to go. "Come as you are" we say, but let's help you navigate the risky, scary journey of change and transformation too. We are definitely imperfect but we can do better together.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair."

Conclusion

John 8:31-32, 34-36: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ... I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a

slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son/daughter belongs to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Linked to this message is a document with several verses which speak of the truth about you and the way God sees you. I commend them to you – to memorise and imbibe!

Action:

Rather than believe falsehoods about yourself I want you to know the truth. As you pursue the truth in Jesus you will be set free – free from fear, anxiety, anger, insecurity, shame.

- Repent – of your sin, of believing the lies
- Receive his forgiveness
- Read the scriptures and learn the truth
- Repair relationships that may have broken
- Take a risk and try again
- Invest your life in the community of faith

May this church, imperfect as it is, be a place where, disciples learn to follow Jesus, believe the truth and are set free and go out to grow healthy, mutual, committed, trusting, loving, replenishing relationships.

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Other Resources

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

Mary Pytches, Between Friends

Scott Peck, The Road Less Travelled

Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People

Melody Beattie, Codependant No More

C.S.Lewis, The Four Loves