

Life Under Construction

“Relationally Connected”

Part 2

Intro: We are wired for relational connections. The need for relationship has been placed into our DNA by God. We have been created by a relational God who created relational beings. We cannot develop into healthy human beings without relational connections. Science has proven this. Our own experiences have proven this. We are designed to bond with others.

- The science behind connection: **READ**

Knowing this, I am convinced this is why we see such an emphasis in the bible on relationships. The greatest command is a two-fold relational command to love God and love others. Just think about this for a moment: God tells us that the greatest thing we can do with our lives is connect relationally with Him and connect relationally with others. WHY? Because this is how we are designed. It is also how His Kingdom is designed. God designed us as relational beings who belong to a relational kingdom.

By far one of the most important building materials we should be using to construct a life that will endure the storms of life are quality, life giving, loving relationships.

- These relational connections function much like how a forest functions. How can these trees continue handle the intense winds and storms every winter? They support each other (explain – Lisa and I were at Crater Lake a couple weeks ago – over 7000 ft.) This is why when you begin to thin trees you see a once strong tree often fall. Why did it fall? It lost relational connection with other trees.
- We are no different. If we do not build our lives with strong relational roots, we build a weak life.
- The big question is this: How do I develop relationships like this? How can I become relationally connected? That is what today is all about. Let me give you 4 ways.

1. Acknowledge Your Need for Connection

- What do I mean by this? For whatever reason, we conclude that we don't need others. We can build a great life by ourselves, by our own effort, strength, wisdom, our own determination. I can will myself forward.
- Usually because of relational pain, disappointment; relational rejection we conclude that we have to do this life thing ourselves. We develop a relational denial that we can build a strong enduring life without others.
- I understand this. I have been at this place relationally. People will disappoint you or reject you so you resolve to will your life forward. I'll just do this life thing myself. I guess I don't need much relational connection.
- Here's the fallacy of this thinking. This type of thinking will only take you so far. There's nothing wrong with determination, will and effort. These are good qualities worth aspiring to. BUT, relational isolation can only take you so far.

- WHY? Because we cannot become all that God designed us to be without others. We will eventually get as far as we can go alone. You will hit a wall professionally / spiritually / developmentally as an individual / hit a wall in your thinking / hit a wall emotionally / hit a wall in your existing relationships. What worked for a while will eventually not work anymore. You will reach a ceiling.
- WHY? Because you are living in a way that is contrary to your design. God will allow you to test your theory about life and then show you that it leads to a dead end.
- Relational isolation will eventually lead you to stagnation.

Prov. 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (NIV) Relationships make us better. Isolation cannot sharpen you.

Ecc. 4:12 "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." (NLT) Once again, notice the strength and protection that comes through relationships.

I Cor. 12:21 "The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." (NLT) (Explain imagery) No one can be a total package by themselves. It is impossible!

- Relational denial disregards the truth of all these passages. We are in essence saying we do not need others. This is a lie that we have believed and it needs to be rejected. Pain has caused many of us to draw wrong conclusions. BUT these conclusions are making our lives weak and vulnerable.
- It's time for some of us to get out of relational denial.

2. Move Into Relational Environments

- If we want to develop empowering relationships with others we must take the first step and place ourselves in environments where these relationships can develop. Don't expect others to drag you out of your isolation.
- Notice how the bible tells us how to think relationally?

Heb. 10:24-25 "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another..." (NLT) Once again notice how the relationships make us better. The relational connection with others help me love better / serve Jesus better / give and receive encouragement better. We are to think of ways to do this relationally with one another.

- This requires us to do the relationally healthy thing and place ourselves in an environment where this can take place. On Sunday mornings, this can be very difficult in a large gathering.

- This is why environments such as Home Groups, serving on a team, attending a smaller bible study, going on a mission trip, the Well, Men's coffee on Wednesdays, are so important. These all provide a relational environment where this connection can take place. Their primary goal is relational not content. WHY? Because people do not grow in the wrong environment. Content alone is not enough.
- Even the way God designed our brains backs this up: **Explain** the left and right side of the brain. Slide on screen - explain
- **Nature teaches us this.** This is why you don't plant your garden in January. It's too cold and not enough sunlight. It works this way with people as well. People grow in the warmth of relational connections. We need both sides of our brains engaged!
- I know we all have reasons why not to be in a move into relational connections. Often our busyness is just an excuse for staying in relational isolation. It's another manifestation where we believe we can do life without others.
- Some of you have not had positive experience trying this in the past. I'm sorry for this. I've had bad experiences with groups as well. This doesn't mean they are the wrong thing to do. I want to ask you to take the risk and try again.
- Fall is a great time to look for opportunities to plug in somewhere.

3. Identify Your Current Relational Status

- A number of years ago I listened to a guy named Dr. Henry Cloud and as he was talking about types of relationships we experience. What he shared had quite an impact on me. I want to share some of this with you.
- He called it the 4 corners of connection. I have talked about them before, but I want to summarize them again so we can think about our own experiences.
- No connection – bad connections – pseudo connection – good connections
- The question we all have to ask ourselves is where are we? What corner do we spend the most of our time? What corner do you want to be in? Are you willing to change corners?

Ps. 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." (NLT)

- What a great prayer for us. Can we simply ask God to help us see ourselves and our relational connections from his perspective? "God, please show me where I am missing out on the relational connections you created me for."

4. Find Empowering Relationships

- Not all relationships empower us. We all know this to be true. It's impossible to remove ourselves from all relationships that are challenging or life draining. That's not reality either. BUT...we must find those relationships that breathe life into us and we must become people who can breathe life into others as well.

- The number one influencer on your life (besides Jesus) are the people you hang out with. Often, this is simply a topic for children and youth. The reality, is this is true for the rest of your life.
- This could be a series all by itself so what I want to do is leave you with one critical component to corner 4 relationships. TRUST. The type of relationships that empower us, encourage us, energize us, are those that have a growing level of trust.
- Once again I want to utilize how Dr. Henry Cloud defines trust and how it is developed. These are great for your own thinking / discussions / and to reflect about your own life and if people can trust you.
- These are also great ingredients we should be striving to grow in our own lives. Like attracts Like. First, are we becoming people others can trust?

5 ingredients of TRUST

➤ Understanding

I will never trust someone who doesn't understand me. Neither will you!
Understanding is a foundation for trust.

Prov. 16:22 "Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it..." (NASB)

If you want to breathe life into your relationships, spend more time trying to understand someone rather than being understood.

- This is why I need relationships and conversations with people who understand what it is like to be a Pastor. It's why I need guys in my life like Pastor Sam, Pastor Mike Clouser, Pastor Michael Esposito. WHY? Because I need to be understood.

○ I've struggled with loneliness on and off over the years.

- Why do you think I share personal stories of my own struggles / failures / hurts with you? So you know I understand. If you believe I understand what you're going through you trust me.
- Who do you have in your life that understand you? Who are you giving yourself to understand? The ability to truly slip into another person's shoes and see life through their eyes is a critical relational skill.

➤ Intent or Motive

- If I don't trust your motives I certainly don't trust you. If I think you are out to manipulate me / criticize me / control me / use me / or you don't care to understand me / I will never trust you.
- Just think about our current political climate in our country. Why do most people not trust our political leaders? We do not trust their motives! Does

anyone really believe they have the people's best interest in mind? Of course not!

- When you think about your relationships, what would people say about you and your motives? Do they genuinely believe you have their best interest in mind? Do they believe you love them / value them / sacrifice for them?

➤ Ability

- People who do things well and in a consistent manner develop trust. Ability is a trust producing ingredient. Inconsistency kills trust in relationships.
- Just think about your work environment. The people you work with who have a consistent track record of getting the job done well you trust. You may not even like them but in the job environment, you trust them. WHY? Ability.
- A number of years ago years ago, Lisa had surgery for 23 years of acid reflux. She had one of the leading surgeons in this field do the surgery. This Dr. had a proven track record and proven ability of successful surgeries in this area.
- When you have surgery, you don't want a general surgeon who maybe has a 50% success rate. That does not inspire confidence. You want the specialist with the precise abilities to do this well.
- Ability produces trust. This is true in the work environment but also in a marriage. The ability to be loving / gracious / forgiving / to listen / to communicate / to serve each other / resolve conflict -

➤ Character

- This is a no brainer. We do not trust people without character. Character inspires trust and confidence. Does yours?
- One of the reasons you trust me is you believe in my character. This doesn't mean I'm perfect but it does mean; "what you see is what you get." You observe the character of my relationships (my wife and I / my kids / my grandchildren / people in the community / here at Foothills.
- I have been in this community for over 40 years as a pastor. Hard to be fake that long.
- Does your character inspire others to trust you?

➤ Track Record

- This is the issue of consistency. Getting back to the example of my wife and her surgery; I wanted a surgeon that had done at least a million of these surgeries successfully! WHY? I wanted a track record! Trust.
- When we can do things well consistently over time people trust us. Whether it is in our jobs / church / relational environments / ministry or marriage.

- Spouses who are trying to learn to trust each other again or grow deeper trust must understand this issue. A week of doing the right thing doesn't inspire trust. Years doing the right thing inspire trust!
- Are you living in a way that is growing your track record and inspiring the trust of these around you?

I know I said that we need to find these types of relationships...and we do. BUT it is imperative that we become people like this. WHY? Because it will attract others with the same characteristics. If you want to find people like this you must become a person like this! Like attracts Like!

I Thess. 5:11 "So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing." (NLT)

We all have room to grow in this area of being relationally connected. Myself included! How do you need to grow in this area? What is one step you can take this week to move towards relational connection?