RELATIONSHIPS PT 1

3 stories of 3 relationships under strain.

This is the start of a little miniseries on relationships. We all have and need relationships. We have all kinds of them. Friendship, colleagues and workmates, bosses, spouses, children, relatives, parents

And we all know that relationships can turn bad. We can get hurt by people. We can get angry. Conflict comes along. And that hurt , that anger, that resentment gnaws away at us. Sometime it is subtle and we don't every realize what has happened. Sometimes we just push things down and pretend it will go away and everything will go back to the way it was.

Relationships bring us the greatest joy and cause us the most grief. The Bible spends a lot of time talking about relationships. It puts a priority on building strong relationships. Why, because it is a reflection of the Trinity. Hence we are told to work hard at living at peace with others 1 Peter 3:11

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. Matthew 5:7 It does not say. " Blessed are the peace lovers." We all love peace. For some they think. " Ignore the issue" and hope to bury it. Peace making is hard work. It is not about avoiding conflict. It is about dealing with conflict well. Many of us would prefer to avoid conflict.

Peace making is not being a doormat and letting people work over us. Jesus was not a door mat. He refused to back down on many issues. He did not go looking for conflict. At times he went out of his way to avoid it. But when confronted with it, he did not run from it either.

We are called to love God and love others. That is, the second most important thing in our lives is to love others. And so conflict resolution is probably the most important skill we can learn. But often as Christains we are really bad at this. Maybe we think conflict is bad and so hope it will go away. Or move churches.

We either bury our emotions like in the first story with Mack and and then suddenly they erupt in ways that are not good. Or like Betty, we tell everyone else about the problem, except the person involved, and sow seeds of disharmony every where. Tanyia is petrified of conflict, and so can't address the issue with her co worker. Instead she deals with the conflict through passive aggressive comments and sarcasism. Her failure to handle conflict well is affecting every area of her life both at work and at home.

So how are we to deal with conflict. Not talking about abuse here. But normal typical conflict that arises

GO

GO: to the person Matthew 5:23-24. Matthew 18:15

Both these passages by Jesus say it is actually our place to go and deal with it, regardless of who is in the right or wrong.

The problem is they might be blissfully unaware they have hurt you. They have no idea the impact of their actions. That comment said in jest they had no idea it would so sting.

Or maybe we have felt ignored by this person. But they have not been ignoring you deliberately. They have just got caught up with other stuff, that you are not aware of. So actually, the issue will never be fixed unless we take the initiative. We are not to wait for the other person. We are to go. This is what God did for us. He did not wait for us to come to him. He went to us, when we were still his enemies. Romans 5:6-11

Jesus is quite clear. No matter who is at fault in causing the breach of relationship, we are to go to talk to the person. I reckon this action alone if we practised as a church would be revolutionary in its impact.

This is not easy. We don't like doing this. We actively resist doing this. WE hate it.

a. We tell someone else. Of course, we only tell them our side of the story. And so naturally the other person looks bad. So, we have damaged someone's reputation. They now will see that person in a different light. A bad light.

b. When we tell someone else, we are hanging on to the hurt We are trying to justify how we feel. That is terrible they say. Vindicates how we feel. We want to nurse that hurt, wallow in the hurt, let it ruminate, brew.

c. We can bury the emotion. I am a good Christian so I should not feel this anger. So, I will pretend it is not there. Or we minimize the issue. Well, it doesn't really matter. But buried hurt and anger don't go away. They just sit underground, buried, but leaking toxins into our soul.

d. Now there is a place for just letting things go, without talking to the person. If it is something small, we can choose to forgive and let it go. We don't always have to go to the person. But if we realize it is still there the next day and the next day, then we need to go to see the person

e. We are scared of conflict and our emotions and the other persons' emotions. Think this is many of us.

f. We think well I am in the right, I am the hurt one, so I am not going to them. They should come to me.

2. GO: as soon as is practical. The first story makes it clear how important this is. They were to stop their offering to God and go and deal with the issue. They were to put the righting of their human relationship ahead of offering their own sacrifice. In that story, remember that it is them who

have offended someone. So, they are not to ask God to forgive their sins, when they have not dealt with the sin on a human level. Forgiveness from God does not mean we can ignore the hard work of reconciliation. Ephesians 5:25-27 says don't let the sun go down on your anger. That might not be always practical, but the point is valid. Don't stew on the matter. Go and see the person.

2. GO; having searched your heart before God. Mat 7:5

Instead of telling everyone else about the issue and how badly we have been treated, the first thing we need to do is talk to God about it and let him speak into our hearts. How have we contributed to the problem? Are there things that we need to confess? We need to ask God to help us bring some perspective on the matter and what is happening within us. Are we being too sensitive, unreasonable, selfish.

Instead of talking to someone else, talk to God first.
Often conflict comes about from either unmet needs or unmet expectations. The unmet need might be real, but no one person can meet all our needs. Some of our deepest needs only God can meet. Unmet expectations are cause a lot of conflict. But often the expectation has not been stated. The other person is not aware of this expectation or has not agreed to it. Or the expectation is unrealistic. Some of our hurt comes about because of our low self-esteem. We don't feel good about ourselves. We don't feel good enough.

GO; with humility Proverbs 15:1

When we have allowed God to search our heart, then we are far more likely to go with a humility. It might be that when we go to talk to the person, we first need to confess our part in the conflict. We might need to own our behaviour and ask forgiveness. We need to take responsibility for our actions and also our feelings.

How we speak to the person is key. If our tone is loud, accusing, angry, chances are the meeting will go pear shaped really fast. If we go in without accusing, but with a desire to listen, then we are more likely to be successful in reconciliation. When we listen to someone else's feelings first, they are more likely to be willing to hear ours. Their feelings are not your responsibility, but they do need to be heard and understood. They might not make sense to you but they need to be validated.

Often, we have jumped to wrong conclusions. We have misunderstood the other person because we have not taken the time to listen. We often assume the worst or have no idea of where the other person is coming from. We interpret their behaviour in a certain way. We jump to conclusions. But when we go in humility, we can listen and are more likely to get a true reading on the situation.

GO: with a desire for reconciliation Romans 12:23

The aim of going is always to restore relationship. It is not just about getting something off our chest. It is about restoring relationship. This does not mean we will always resolve the issue. We might never be able to fully resolve the issue. But that does not mean we cannot restore relationship. We don't have to agree on everything. But we can still have a positive relationship.

This means we will focus on the issue at hand not the person. The key thing we should address is the actions, rather than attack the person. What is the behaviour or action that needs to be addressed. Accusations like "You make me so angry when you are not ready on time"., "You are always so selfish" are not helpful statements. The person will always go on the defensive. They will further the rift.

You are responsible for your feelings. They are responsible for their actions. Focus on the behaviour that needs to change. You can share how you feel. But focus on the problem, rather than attack the character of the person.

If the goal is the restoration of relationship, then we also must be willing to accept someone else's apology and offer forgiveness. Or we must be willing to ask for forgiveness for our own actions. Debbie is going to talk about this more next week.

So, when there is conflict, or relationship breakdown, we are to GO. A one-word sermon. But really tough to do. Who do you need to GO to?

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How did you see conflict resolved in your family of origin? Have you found yourself using the same style?
2. How aware are you of your own emotions and that of others? Are you able to articulate these easily with those around you?
3. What stops you going to someone when there is an issue?
4. Can you think of a time when you jumped to the wrong conclusion about someone by misinterpreting their behaviour?
5. Why do we often jump to make the worst interpretation of a person's actions rather than the best?
6. Discuss. "The other person is not responsible for your feelings, but their behaviour." Is this true?
7. It is impossible for a Christian to be mature and yet have a low EQ. Is this true? Why are we so often bad at this stuff?
8. What can we do to encourage reconciliation between others?