

## **REALationships Series 3, PAVE the WAY**

By: Zach Sloane

### **Recap:**

#### **Philippians 2:5 (NIV)**

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

### **Healthy Relationships Happen:**

1. When You Let Go
2. When You Go Low
3. When You Do More
4. When You Say Lord

*Let's be REAL!* Relationships can be tough and the temptation to isolate and withdraw can be real. BUT, leaning in and pursuing relationship and connection is worth the effort because:

1. We Were Designed for Relationship
2. Relationships are good for our health and well-being.
3. Healthy ones help you to be you.

### **Intro:**

Once we have embraced the right mindset, the Jesus mindset, and we have determined that relationships are worth our time and investment, there are some practical things that we can, skills we can acquire, and some development that the Spirit of God would work out in each of our lives to help us engage our relationships in a successful way.

What if Christian discipleship focused primarily on developing the gifts of the Spirit, walking in the power of God, renewing our minds, learning growing, studying the Word etc is slightly unbalanced when not married to the pursuit of love, love that is worked out in good relationships. We are to pursue both.

#### **1 Corinthians 14:1 (NKJV)**

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy."

God has decided that the revelation of who He is is best communicated through the medium of relationships between Himself and people, and people to people. All of his plans for our lives are worked out in relationship.

Some of us still are waiting for our big chance, that thing that's going to launch you. But what if what's missing is not the right opportunity, the right skills, the right money, the right time. Sometimes what's missing is the right people and the right relationships.

We need to invest in relationships and the skills that go with them, and not as a matter of religious works, but because God Himself is at work in us to manifest his perfect relational heart and person in and through us.

Skills that will PAVE the way to success in relationship and life.

**P**resence

**A**uthenticity

**V**ulnerability

**E**xpectation Management

### **1. Presence - or being present.**

"Distance creates distortion." God tried to speak through intermediaries because Israel insisted on distance in the wilderness. God tried to relate to us, make himself known through the law and the prophets, but the distortions they brought couldn't be overcome without closing the gap in distance. So, Jesus came to us, as one of us.

#### **Philippians 2:6-8 (NIV)**

*"...being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"*

Being present is a lot more than just being in proximity. Just as important as being physically present is being present **to** the people we are in relationships with, not just present **with** them.

#### **Philippians 4:17**

*"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."*

He was so present with them and to them that he made a mark, something that was lasting when he was physically absent.

**Authenticity**

The failure to be authentic in relationship can be fatal to that relationship. Think about it, if you cannot be real, cannot express your true self, needs, desires, and personality, but rather feel like in order to maintain a relationship or even to enter into one in the first place you have to be something you are not, that relationship is doomed to fail.

Authenticity is a big deal. But it is not a license to run around and demand your own way, or just dump all your thoughts, feelings, and opinions all over everyone in the name of "being real."

Being authentic actually has nothing to do with you imposing yourself:

### **Philippians 2:3-4**

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Brene Brown in her book "The Gifts of Imperfection" she defines authenticity as:

*"...the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are..."*

What if we were free enough in our relationships and ourselves, courageous enough in the love of God to say "you know what, I quit! I am letting go of what I think, or what you think I am supposed to be and I am just going to be me."

Paul gives us an amazing example of what this looks like in Philippians.

### **Philippians 3:4-6**

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

He spent so much time trying to be what he thought God wanted him to be, what his teachers, his cultural influencers, his peers wanted him to be and what he thought he should be.

### **Philippians 3:7-9**

*But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth*

*of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

He quit trying to be something and embraced his God given identity. He got real. And by getting real, by embracing his God given identity, that allowed him to be real with others.

### **Philippians 3:12**

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

Knowing who he really as in Christ, that he was righteous in Jesus, loved, he was able to engage in relationship with people at a whole new level. He didn't need to hide behind the facade of keeping up appearances and performing, but was able to own his identity and be honest about his life. He didn't have to have all the answers or present as complete in himself. He could be honest and say this like, "I haven't already arrived, but I press on."

### **Vulnerability.**

Vulnerability defined by Brene Bown is "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure."

Being vulnerable is not so much something that you decide to do as it is acknowledging that life is full of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. If you attempt to eliminate these things from your life and your relationships you will never experience life or relationships to their fullest.

"If you trade your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief." – Brené Brown

Its in that space in our relationships where we are trying to protect ourselves from the risk of rejection and shame that is inherent in all relationships, its actually in that space of trying to protect ourselves where all the unhealthy things like addictions, resentment, blame and rage start to fester and grow.

In Philippians Epaphroditus risked his life for Paul (Philippians 2:30), and we see Paul asking the Philippians church to put themselves out there to "shine like stars in sky in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation"

Vulnerability is not the confessing of all of your stuff and self-debasement. It is the willingness to embrace risk by making yourself available to others even when the possibility exist that you will be hurt.

It's also in this place of risk, uncertainty and exposure that you also find:

"...the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change."- Brené Brown

### **Expectation Management**

One of the worst things we can do to another person in a relationship is to place ridiculous expectations on people. Its at this point when you start to formulate expectations for the other person or people in your relationships where the relationship moves from being a source of life, joy and strength, to an experience that suffocates, smothers, binds and detracts.

William Shakespeare once said that, "Expectation is the root of all heartache."

We have to be satisfied with Christ and not expect people to fill a void in our lives that only Jesus can. The inverse is also true. You can't try to be that person for others, no matter how much you love them. Sometimes it's better to let someone you love embark on their own heart wrenching journey than it is to try to make them co-dependent because you can't handle to see them struggle for a bit. No, you have to trust Jesus with the people you love.

Expectations that are healthy, ***they are other centred, they move us forward, and they are rooted in a deep hope and trust in God.***

### **Hebrews 6:9**

*"We are persuaded concerning you brethren of better things, things accompanying salvation. Its of these things we speak."*

That sounds like expectations and he's not afraid to say it. When we can communicate with each other in relationships about expectations in a healthy way, it becomes a way to motivate one another in the faith, not to complete one another. To say I expect this in your life is not a demand I am placing on someone, it's a statement of faith in the power of God, deeply rooted in our salvation.

See how this works in Philippians.

### **Philippians 1:4 & 6**

*"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

### **Philippians 2:12-13**

*"...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you to will and to do His good pleasure."*

He had an expectation. He said now that I am not with you guys to hold you by the hand and explain all this stuff for you, you guys work it out yourselves. Work out your own salvation without me, you can do it. And the reason why you can do it is this, and this is the key to all godly expectations: "it is God who is at work in you to will and to do his good pleasure."

Alanis Morrissette "I don't want to be your better half, 1+1 equals 2." When you can enter into a relationship without expectation on the other to complete you, but you realize your completion in Christ, you come as two whole people and create something whole.

### **Summary:**

Developing the skills required to do relationships well is not only a major worthwhile investment, but it is I believe, the primary way that God is seeking to disciple us through his love and Spirit in our lives.

If you let God's Spirit and love disciple us we will learn how to be present in our relationships. We will practice authenticity, vulnerability, and we will let go of all unhealthy expectations we place on ourselves and others, find our completion in Christ, and the language of expectation will turn away from demanding things from others towards instead launching them into a life of faith-filled expectancy that is rooted in God and His salvation.

When you put all this together and embrace God's work in us in these ways, it will PAVE the way to healthy and productive relationships.