



Weekly Devotional

A large, solid red heart graphic that serves as a background for the ampersand in the title.

YOU & ME

Relationships in
a Modern World

A photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, positioned to form a heart shape. The hands are light-skinned and the background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

February 13 - 17 2012

Questions & Prayers

Monday: Pray for the nation as we enter into this election year. Pray for God's will and for us to be open to His guidance as we discuss issues and vote.

Tuesday: Pray for Governments around the world. Pray especially for the people in Syria.

Wednesday: Pray for the youth events and for the New Member classes. Pray that the people of Glenkirk will have opportunities to share God's love and the Good News this week with people whom they come in contact.

Thursday: Pray for the marriages of people you know and for the families at Glenkirk.

Friday: Pray for folks going through the loss of relationship—whether through divorce, death, or the breakups that come through dating.

1. Why do you believe Jesus begins this section the way He does? What religious activities would be closely akin to “offering your gifts at the altar”? Why is it necessary “to get things right” with people before we come to worship God?
2. What should be a believer's goal in a strained or shattered relationship?
3. What principles are behind Jesus' teachings in this section? Why are they important? How do you see them evident in God? Evident in His relationship to us?
4. How should we respond to our enemies and those who commit evil? Why do you think we often do not?
5. How does God treat evil people and good people in the same way? Why?
6. What radical statements about our eyes and hands does Jesus make? Where does sin ultimately lead if it is not dealt with? What does it mean to gouge out a habit for lust or to cut off a sinful practice?
7. Why are our moral choices important?



Monday

Matthew 22:35-40; Luke 10



Recently in Women's Bible Study we talked about the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the Great Priority. We see the Great Commandment here: to love God and our neighbors. In Luke the discussion of this commandment is followed by the story of the Good Samaritan, basically bringing to our attention the need to love our enemies as ourselves. Right before the commandment is the episode where Jesus sends out the 72 (basically the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations—not converts, but disciples). The great priority is seen in Acts 1 where Jesus tells the disciples to be His witness to Judea (the place where we live), Samaria (the places where we have enemies) and to the ends of the earth (to those who have power over us and those we do not even know). In Jesus' day the "ends of the earth" was Rome. Simply put, to be a Christian is to fulfill the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the Great Priority. How are we doing?

Often when I think of being a Christian, I think of putting my faith in Jesus, asking for forgiveness, and having a personal relationship with Him. But Jesus would say that my definition is only the beginning. If I really had faith, if I were really sorry for my past life, I would seek to live as He lived, to have the priorities that He had, and to do the will of the Father as He did. To that I often find myself saying, "Okay, but only after I _____ (fill in the blank)." In one sense the question constantly comes down to this: Do I really love God for who He is or for what He does for me?

This week we are going to be talking about broken relationships and forgiveness. The question is constantly going to come back to this: Will I trust God even when I do not understand, even when it is not convenient, even when it is risky and makes me vulnerable? Are there limits that I put on my obedience?

Tuesday

Matthew 5:31-37; 19:3-9



Divorce is a painful subject. In many respects it is even more painful than the loss of a spouse through death because of the feelings of failure and often betrayal. There is the constant reminder of dreams that will never be fulfilled, not to mention that often one or the other is out to inflict vengeful pain on the other party.

Today's divorce rate seems to be at an all-time high, but divorce was common also in Jesus' day. We know that in Jesus' day there was a debate between two different schools of thought. One school said that the only reason for divorce was infidelity. The other school was much more lax; a man could divorce his wife for any reason, including burning dinner. The Pharisees are asking Jesus to weigh in on the debate.

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' questions is in three parts. First, "He points out that the Pharisees are more preoccupied with the grounds for divorce rather than the institution of marriage. For Jesus marriage is a divine institution by which God makes permanently one two people in order to form a new unit of society." (*Christian Counter Culture*, John Stott, p. 94) Marriage is not something society thought up; God institutes it for His purposes. Whatever society today believes about marriage, the church (Christians) need to teach obedience to God's intended will. Marriage is not an option; it is God ordained. It models for us God's oneness and never-ending commitment to us. I wonder if one of the reasons for the increase in divorce is because we see marriage and relationship as a choice rather than God ordained. We talk in terms of our decision rather than obedience to God.

Marriage, though, does not always work out, and often one party is still trying to work on the relationship while the other leaves. The church needs to come along side and love those going through the pain of divorce. But at the same time, we also need to encourage people to stay faithful even in the midst of the hard times. Focusing less on our immediate feelings and instead asking God what He might be doing or trying to teach us is helpful. Keeping ourselves open to relationship rather than closing ourselves off because of the pain is excruciatingly hard but possible with the grace of God. Rather than looking for a way out, trying to find God in the midst of the struggle is Jesus' take. How can we do this ourselves? How can we support our friends as they struggle? How do we focus on commitment rather than on a possible way out? Those are just some of the questions we might ask ourselves.

Wednesday



Matthew 5:31-37; 19:3-9

Yesterday we began to look at Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question about divorce. Today we will continue. Jesus first focused on marriage rather than on divorce; and when the "Pharisees called Moses' provision for divorce a command, Jesus called it a concession to the hardness of human hearts." (*Christian Counter Culture*, John Stott, p. 94) Again, we need to remember that not everyone has a choice in whether to stay married or not. Often one party wants to keep trying while another has decided it is time to leave. But Jesus is asking that, rather than looking for possible loopholes, we realize that God never intended loopholes to be present.

Jesus here is saying that because of sin in the world and because we are not perfect, God has allowed for some concessions; but concessions were never God's intended purpose. Concessions are always second best. In fact, the third thing that we see in this discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees is that the Pharisees regarded divorce lightly; but Jesus took it so seriously that with only one exception, He called all remarriage after divorce adultery. This is a hard saying today. To understand it, we need to keep it in the context of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 that we looked at a few weeks ago. We are not to have as our primary purpose marriage and the things of this world, but God and what He might be doing. But again, as Jim reminded us, this teaching towards celibacy is not for everyone. The great thing about the cross is that there is forgiveness and there are new beginnings. We have the privilege of starting over. But we should never get divorced hoping for something better, hoping to be released from the trials of relationship because God often uses relationships to sharpen us, to take off our rough edges.

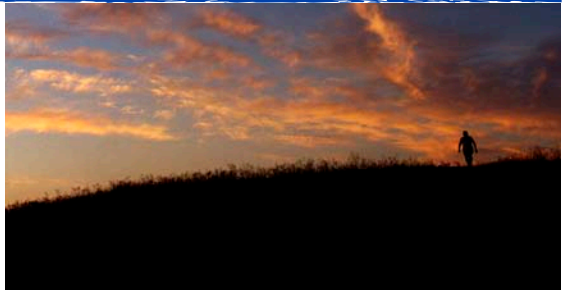
This idea of iron sharpening iron is never pleasant. Sparks fly during the process. But to become the people that God wants us to become, we often need to trust Him during the process. The question becomes: In marriage as in friendship and as in our relationship with God, am I willing to trust God with what I do not understand, trusting Him to make a better way, trusting the process He uses to make me like Jesus?

Thursday

Matthew 5:33-48

We are in the middle of a series on relationships. We can take each one of these paragraphs as stand-alone saying by Jesus, or we can let them be building blocks that enable us to become God-like in our relationships with people. For example, the last few days we have been looking at marriage and divorce. If we are to read these as building blocks, we might see Jesus reminding us that the promises we make when we get married are serious and not to be seen as contracts where we find loopholes that enable us to get out. Furthermore, we are to be on our guard towards anything that might cause for the breakdown of a relationship and deal severely with those temptations. Often times we finally seek marriage counseling too late after the brick walls have been built and the mortar hardened. Often the issues that cause for the breakdown of a relationship come through seemingly little things, such as finding emotional support in something or someone other than one's spouse. Finally, there is the call to love those who are hard to love. Sometimes loving the person we are living with seems like loving our enemy. But it is when we love during tough times that God's grace is especially evident.

The real question constantly goes back to this: Am I willing to trust God, or will I give into the temptation to take things into my own hands—whether it is giving up rather than going to court or allowing my “yes” to stand even when it hurts. If God is our provider, if He is the God who can move mountains, then I can trust Him through thick and thin. The world around us will cause us to doubt. The world around us will tell us to look for loopholes so that we can walk away from relationships—whether in marriage or friendship. God, though, sent His Son to die on a cross, even while we were walking away from Him, in order to restore relationships. Relationships are that important. Are we willing to do the same? Besides, we might be the very one whom God is using to help the other person become the person God created him (her) to be.



Friday

Matthew 5:33-48



Do you remember as a child asking someone to “cross his or her heart”? As adults we ask people to sign on the dotted line. There was a day when a handshake meant everything. I am sure many are still brought up that way. I am sure many are still taught, “Your word is your oath.” But in our world today, unfortunately, all too often that is not the case. Even though we may give our word, when keeping it becomes costly, inconvenient or painful, it is broken. Many have become masters at giving an appearance of speaking the truth while holding back information that might sway an argument to our disadvantage and to their advantage.

Jesus here is challenging us to be people who can be taken at face value. People who do not hide behind fancy words or obscurities. People others can say of us, “What you see is what you get.” People whose simple word can be taken at face value even when it might hurt. Jesus is calling us to be not only people who never tell little white lies, but people who believe in full disclosure and the keeping of contracts and commitments. This is challenging, especially in a society that is so prone to litigation. But Jesus is asking us not to fit in but to stand out and to be a light in a very dark world.

Standing out also means seeking the best for those who desire to hurt us. Christians are not immune to telling political jokes about people, which are really put-downs. When others hear us singling out a group of people for any reason, our witness is destroyed. Even when we make disparaging remarks about people caught in sin, others check us off as being people who are judgmental rather than loving. Jesus came declaring that God’s rule had come. His miracles and resurrection showed that He has the power to overcome any circumstance. If God has not dealt with our enemies yet, it is because He is doing something greater than we can even begin to imagine. We have nothing to fear but Him, and He is completely love and a Father who desires to provide and care for us. The question is: Do we truly trust Him? Do our words and actions show our trust?



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