

PUTTING THINGS IN *Perspective*

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

I. We all have relationships.

1. What is the quality of your relationships?
2. If you could change something about how you relate to others, what would it be?
3. Think of your best friend. What makes your relationship rewarding?
4. How does our culture shape our relationships?
5. How have relationships in America changed over the past fifty years? What have been the results of those changes?
6. What are some strengths and weaknesses of relationships among conservative Mennonites?

II. God's Word is our standard.

1. What are some basic principles for relationships in our Scripture text?
2. How do these principles match our natural inclinations?
3. Under what conditions are we tempted to follow our own inclinations in relationships rather than honor what God's Word says?
4. What are the results of following God in building relationships?
5. What are the results of not following God in building relationships?

Relationship

WITH GOD

I. What does God want from His relationship with us?

- A. God wants us to love Him. *Matthew 22:37-40*
1. What does it mean to love God?
 2. What are evidences of love? of lack of love?
 3. What are hindrances and helps to loving God?
 4. Why do you think this is the “greatest command”?
 5. Why do you think Jesus spoke about the “second command” (v. 39)?
- B. God wants us to know Him. *John 17:3*
1. Describe different levels of knowing God.
 2. On what level does God want us to know Him?
 3. How is learning to know God similar to learning to know other people? How is it different?
 4. Without faith we cannot know God. How do we exercise faith?
 5. What are some ways God has helped bridge the gap between us and Him?
- C. God wants us to obey Him. *1 John 2:3-6*
1. Why do humans not want to obey God?
 2. Why do Christians sometimes not obey God?
 3. Under what conditions is it especially difficult to obey God?
 4. Under what conditions is obedience especially important?

II. How does our relationship with God affect our relationships with others?

1. Are Christians harder or easier to get along with than non-Christians?
2. As people deepen their relationship with God, how does that affect their relationships?
3. What happens in interpersonal relationships when a Christian begins to grow cold toward God?
4. What does it mean for the peace of God to rule in our hearts? (Colossians 3:15)

CLOSENESS IN *Relationships*

Scriptures: I Samuel 18:1-4; Ruth 1:8-17

What is our most imperative need? It is the need for relatedness—the need to love. We are lonely for ourselves, for our neighbors and for our God. Our unhappy behavior roots in our inability to love. By love we mean a capacity for the experience of concern, responsibility, respect and understanding of other persons, as well as an intense desire for closeness with someone. That we must be brethren is the fundamental law of our being!

1. Do you agree or disagree with Freer's last sentence? Explain why.
2. What is the difference between saying our need for relatedness as brethren is "the fundamental law of our being" versus "a fundamental law of our being"?
3. What are the implications of the two concepts?

I. Levels of Relationship

1. Write a definition or list some words that define each level.
 - a. Stranger
 - b. Acquaintance
 - c. Coworker
 - d. Friend
 - e. Life companion

¹ Freer, Harold, *Two or Three Together*, (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1954), p. 15.

II. Understanding Closeness

1. In your own life, try to think of one person in each of these five categories.
2. Try to list at least five people on the friendship level. Which of them is closest to you?
3. Why are some friends closer to you than others?
4. Have you had a friendship that moved from very close to distant? Have you seen this in other people's relationships? What were the reasons for the change?
5. What are some factors involved in letting one person get very close and not another?
6. What are some of God's guidelines for friendships?
7. What are some of God's guidelines for life companionship?
8. What happens when we disregard God's guidelines?
9. What are our natural responses when we are hurt by someone close to us?
10. What are healthy responses?
11. Is it ever right for a Christian to raise a barrier between himself and someone else? If so, under what circumstances?
12. Describe in a nutshell how barriers can be broken down.