Jesus’ wisdom for our relationships

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Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] It was Shakespeare in Midsummer Night's Dream who said the course of true love never did run! A recognition I imagine we all have that relationship comes, relationships come with challenges and conflicts.

! Relationships can get messy, whether that's the fight with our siblings, the misunderstandings that we might have in a marriage, whether it's dealing with a difficult colleague or the breakdown of trust and communications that can happen.
I'm going to recommend a book, it's called Relationships Are Mess Worth Making? written by Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp. And the idea is just that reality that any relationship does involve a level of mess, but also those difficult relationships that we have become a chance for us to grow in humility and in understanding because God's grace is there to meet us in our mess. It's a really helpful book, I think, in navigating relationships.
But here in our section on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus keeps on teaching about relationships. He's spoken about how important it is that we know God as our Father in heaven. That's fundamental.
And then he's gone to speak about our relationship to our money and our possessions, and I think we know how important that is for our day-to-day life. And now he turns to the crucial question of the relationship we have with the people around us.
[1:36] This has always been vital wisdom, and it's absolutely vital wisdom for today. We live in the age of loneliness. We live in the age of loneliness. We have a government minister for loneliness.

We live at a time when online shunning and shaming happens all too readily. And so we look for and we long for in the midst of that good health in our relationships.
That we long for that within our church community here to have good, healthy, growing relationships. And in our wider community and circles also.
You probably noticed as the section that Jesus was teaching draws to a close, we have what's become known as the golden rule. In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. Now, I imagine we could share that idea with anyone, and they would admire it absolutely. But ask us to try and achieve it, and we understand how much harder that is to do.
[2:41] It's been interesting in history that philosophers, like the Chinese philosopher Confucius, or Kant in the Enlightenment, and probably every parent ever has kind of adapted the golden rule.

You know, we say to our kids, Well, if you don't want them to be mean to you, you don't be mean to them. And that's really good wisdom, but it's more silver rule than golden rule.
So what we typically do is we make this rule more passive and more limited. Well, let's think about what we won't do to upset someone else. But what does Jesus do? He makes it active.
He talks about what positive good, what love can I bring for the sake of someone else? What good would I want? Let me positively seek to do it to them. So it's one of these summaries, I think, that Jesus gives of God's law and of God's will.
Love your neighbor as yourself. Be a good Samaritan to whomever you meet. And as we listen in, we recognize that what Jesus teaches for our relationships, it is going to be demanding.
[3:51] It is calling us to a selflessness, which is sacrificial. But wonderfully, Jesus is speaking to people within his kingdom. And within the kingdom of God, with God's help, this is doable.

Not that we'll be able to do it perfectly, but we truly can do good to others. We truly can grow health in our relationships, both with one another and with our God.
So that's what we're going to think about today. We're going to think about the path to follow in our relationships, looking at those first six verses. We're going to think about the power for healthy relationships in verses 7 to 11.

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And then we're going to look at the picture portrait of loving, healthy relationships as we have it in verse 12. So we begin thinking about the path to follow in our relationships.
Whenever we are navigating, maybe some of you have moved to the city quite recently, or maybe you've been on holiday recently. Whenever you're navigating somewhere that's new, you're looking for either road signs or maybe key landmarks.
[5:00] So maybe you've already figured out that the castle or Arthur's seat, really good landmarks for getting around the city. Some way to navigate and figure out, am I going in the right direction? Well, in the same way as you and I are seeking to navigate our relationships, and sometimes they're complicated and sometimes they're messy, Jesus gives us these road signs.

He gives us a road map to follow. He gives us pointers that we can look at and think about, am I heading on the king's highway of wisdom or not? And let me encourage you, as we begin to think about these signs, that you're asking yourself that question.
Think about your relationships. Is that relationship heading in a right direction? Maybe what would others say about that? Because Jesus wants us to reflect, and he wants us to know there is help for us, there is wisdom for us.
Should I keep going with the way that I've been going, or is there something that needs to change? Is it time for a U-turn? So what are these signs that Jesus gives on the path of healthy relationships?
There are three that we can see. One is generosity, one is humility, and one is discernment. So we begin with generosity.
[6:17] Look at the first couple of verses. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. In the same way as you judge others, you will be judged. It's interesting, chapter 7 begins a new focus on the character and the nature of our God.

In chapter 5, very much God as king. Chapter 6, God as father. Chapter 7, there's a great emphasis on Jesus speaking about God as the judge. And the fact that God is judge should influence how we live, and that should affect our relationships.
But also Jesus is recognizing what happens in human relationships. The measure that we dish out to someone else is most likely the same measure that's going to come back to us, for good or for ill. But Jesus is saying, do not judge. So he's talking about a negative attitude. Let's think about what he means. But first of all, let's think about what he doesn't mean, because we could easily get this wrong. Jesus is not saying that you and I should never judge what is right and wrong, or what's good and evil.
So, you can just go to verse 15, and we see that. He says, watch out for false prophets. Or verse 6, do not give dogs what is sacred.
[7:31] There's obviously times where we have to judge on what we should do, what we shouldn't do. Likewise, Jesus is not saying that you and I as Christians should never lovingly correct another brother or sister.

So look at the end of verse 5. He talks about removing a plank, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. In other words, there are times when we should correct.
So what is Jesus saying we shouldn't do? Well, there's a particular type of judging, which we might call being judgmental. We shouldn't claim authority over someone else in a way that we are critical towards them, we are demanding of them.
It's our instinct to be fault-finding towards others. Instead, we should follow the pattern that God sets, and we should practice generosity.
We should give one another the benefit of the doubt. We don't want to throw shade on others. We don't want to assume the worst of others in their motivations.
[8:44] Somebody has said, assumptions are the termites of relationships. If we make negative assumptions and assessments, it is always going to be destructive.

And so when Jesus says, do not judge, he wants us in our relationships to give the other person freedom. Don't keep the other person in fear of the next tongue lashing or criticism.
Practice generosity that gives freedom for trust to be established, for patience to be shown. There's one signpost for healthy relationships.
We're practicing generosity. Here's another one. It's humility. And that takes us to the picture of verses 3 to 5. And here, Jesus uses comedy, irony.

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Here is the hypocrite, the play actor on stage, and he's taking a certain role. And this role is of the perfect person. Somebody who has no faults.
[9:47] Somebody who has perfect wisdom. Someone who feels that they can be the final authority on someone else's behavior and actions. They're always ready to spot the speck in someone else's life at 100 yards.

Always trying to fix others. But what's the massive problem? As Jesus tells this little story, the person who claims that perfect perspective has got the massive log sticking out of his eye.
It is easy for us to be desensitized to our own sins and to be hypersensitive to the sins that we see in others.
It is all too easy to play the hypocrite where I'm not really dealing with my own sin problem, but I'm really happy to diagnose and perform surgery on yours.
It's the problem of pride. And we recognize that an armchair critic on someone else's life does not make for a great friend.
[10:55] There's a lack of mercy, a lack of patience, a tendency to make mountains out of molehills. And so, you and I, Jesus says, we need not hypocrisy but humility.

To own our own sin. To deal with our own failings first. To recognize that we always need mercy. That yes, we can help others.
And actually, we should always want to help others, but because we love them, not from a position of pride. We should move towards someone to care for them because we want to help not to boost our egos or to tear them down.
So, we need humility. And then there's this third signpost, a bit more unusual, verse 6. We need discernment. So, Jesus says there, do not give dogs what is sacred and do not throw your pearls to pigs.
If you do, they may trample them underfoot and turn and tear you to pieces. So, Jesus takes two ancient proverbs and he gives them to the people and they have a very similar point.
[12:01] And the similar point is that there are certain actions that are just known to be inappropriate. Perhaps to help us in our own day. You know, you wouldn't invite, as much as we care for our dogs, we wouldn't invite them to sit with us at the dinner table.

Or even to sit on the dinner table. Or we wouldn't present a pig with a pearl necklace. We understand instinctively there are certain actions that are inappropriate.
You don't mix holy and unholy is the kind of picture here. And Jesus is saying at a general level, there is a wisdom, there is a discernment that you and I need for what we should and what we shouldn't do in each of our relationships.
And maybe we're new as Christians. And we're beginning to understand, oh, there's stuff that I need to avoid in my friendships now that I'm a Christian.
There are things that I used to do that now I don't want to do because I know it would invite trouble.
So, generally speaking, we need that discernment and wisdom. But I think Jesus has in mind here, remember he's speaking to disciples, people in his kingdom.
[13:12] There's a specific teaching going on here. In the mission of Jesus, and we see this in the disciples, whenever we are sharing the good news, whenever we are telling people about Jesus, some people will choose to resist.

And some people might even become hostile to the good news and those who bring that good news. There will always be some people who will turn their back on God's Savior, who will want to avoid God's message of salvation, of forgiveness and love, and would like to make trouble cause suffering to the person who talks to them about Jesus.
And what we see in the Gospels and also in the book of Acts is that in extreme cases, when that happens, when there is deliberate hostile rejection, to use the language of the Bible, there are times when the disciples shake the dust off their feet and move on to another plane.
There has to be a discernment. Jesus doesn't call us to be stormtroopers in the kingdom of God, enforcing the good news on people.
I think that's one of the reasons why the suffering church, where there's real intense suffering, they often pray, give me wisdom today. And who should I share Jesus with?
[14:47] Who should I be careful about sharing Jesus with? Our relationships, Jesus is saying, need discernment.

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They need wisdom to sense motives, to sense attitudes, to understand who should I invest time in. And so Jesus gives us these three signs to help us to ask ourselves the question, are my relationships on the right track?
As you reflect on some of the people in your lives and your dealings with them, am I generous in how I treat them, how I treat perhaps the other members of this church?
Am I humble enough within my circles to see my own faults and to be dealing with them most of all?
Am I exercising biblical wisdom in my behavior?
Am I saying, are there warning signs that in my attitudes, I might actually be making a relationship worse?
[15:54] Or positively, if I was to apply these principles, by God's grace, can I see progress?
Because what Jesus wants is he wants for his people and he wants for his church and he wants for this church to be a place full of healing and full of hope, full of trust and patience and mercy and kindness.

Because that's a wonderful community to be a part of. And it's a wonderful way to show to our very fractured society, society, here's the difference, here's the goodness of what Jesus has come to bring.
When we are combining grace and mercy, when we're combining truth and love in our family and our friendship, we're encouraged to recognize that we are walking on the King's wisdom highway.
So that's the path for our relationships. But let's move from there to think about the power that we need for these healthy relationships.
Because I imagine we're feeling a sense of tension. In our summer holidays, we rediscovered a love for e-bikes. Some of us have been on e-bikes and enjoyed just being able to zip around.
[17:17] It's nice and easy. We like to go to a place called Biarritz and you can get an e-bike really easily. You can put a passenger on the back and it's great fun, great way to explore the city until, if you've had an e-bike, you might have had this moment.

It's great fun until the battery dies. And then it becomes torture. And it can also become torture if you're trying to use the wrong power setting.
So these wonderful e-bikes that we like, you can go solo if you're just one of you. But if there's two of you, you need the dual mode. You need the extra boost. But if you forget to press that button and you're trying to get up a steep hill, again, it is torture.
There are times, perhaps even now, when some of our relationships feel like that. Where we recognize, this is not the way I want it to be.
But we're struggling uphill. We're struggling to see where change might come from. As people, we are complex. As people, we are sinful.
[18:24] We can be so quick to jump to wrong conclusions, to assume the worst. We've said, we've done the wrong things. There's mess. How do we change?

How do we fix it? And so often, we can find ourselves powerless. How will I keep going? Our emotional battery, perhaps, feels drained. We can feel stuck.
And again, if that's you, there is hope here from Jesus. Because right at the center of his teaching, he's going to remind us that the power that you and I need, the grace that we need, the wisdom we need, the help and mercy we need, it actually doesn't come from inside of us.
It comes from outside of ourselves. It comes from our Father in heaven. A Father in heaven who is generous and who loves to give good gifts.
Jesus has already spoken about his Father as the great King. He is a great King with a great, huge amount of treasure, and he loves to share that treasure. He is the God of grace who has provision to meet us in our mess and to help us, so that with him we really can change and our relationships can change.
[19:40] We can find health and goodness. Jesus teaches us about our Father in heaven. Right in the middle of this teaching on healthy relationships.

Because if we want true health, we want, first of all, to get right our relationship with our God and Father. To let him help us in all our other relationships.
Notice the two things that Jesus says that we should do and what we should know about our Father. First, we should come open-handed and empty-handed to our Father in heaven. Ask and it will be given to you, verse 7.

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Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Jesus taking us to a familiar picture of a child, perhaps, who really needs and wants something.
There is a determination in the asking, a determination that grows. It grows. I really want this, and so I'm not going to give up. And Jesus says, as children of our Father in heaven, we should ask this way for two reasons.
[20:54] One, because we really need something. And two, because we have a Father who really wants to give it to us. We really do need in our relationships the help and the wisdom of our God.

We really do need the grace of our God. When we go into that conversation, we need to know and to be guided. What's the right thing to say? If we're meeting a family member after we've had a falling out, we need to know, how can I make those movements towards reconciliation?
So we ask, we seek, we knock. Someone calls this the beggar's logic. We come with nothing except our need, but we know we come to the King who has everything.
And when we do, we discover He's our loving Father who wants to meet with us and to help us. So we come open-handed. But secondly, we come and ask because our Father is generous and good.
And that's the point of those dinner table pictures. You know, there's those two meals we're never going to serve up. We're never going to serve a stone or a snake to someone who's hungry.
[22:01] Even though we're not perfect, we understand that. We understand what it looks like to care for someone else. And Jesus applies the how much more logic. If you then know how to give good gifts, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him, to those who ask Him?

So we need to know the character of our God, and then we need to ask and seek and knock. The book of James says we need to ask with faith, to believe that He will answer, to believe that He does want to give what is best for our lives.
He is a Father who cares. And He cares about our relationships. And He can help.
And He does want to help. And He does want to give us the power to build good friendships. And so we come and we ask on that basis, knowing He has power and He has love, to help us.
So the power that we need for healthy relationships that we long for doesn't ultimately come from ourselves. It comes from our Father.
[23:13] And then as we close, let's go back to verse 12, where we're given the picture of healthy, loving relationships. What does it look like?

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets. What does it look like to love our neighbor? Do to others what you would have them do to you.
Some of us, I know, enjoy jigsaw puzzles. There's a great sense of satisfaction on working on a puzzle, completing a puzzle. But imagine doing something bigger than a children's puzzle.
Imagine doing a 500 or a 1,000-piece puzzle without ever having seen the picture on the box. You know, pick any piece you like, and you're going to have no clue where that piece is going to fit because you don't know what the big picture is.
You don't know how to build the connections if you don't have a sense of the big picture. Perhaps that image captures in a way some of the confusion many people feel about relationships.
[24:17] Maybe you've heard, you know, through school, through culture, the message, you know, the most important thing is be true to yourself.

You know, you do you. That's the most important thing, is make sure that you're happy. Love yourself. You know, and if we have those messages, and if everyone in this room was to do that, do you know what would happen?
We'd all end up really isolated. We would give up on one another when things get tough.
If I make it my aim to just live for my own personal happiness without reference to the wider community, I will make a mess of my relationships. And so lots of people are hearing these messages, but then sort of living with this confusion.
It doesn't really fit. It doesn't connect with building good, healthy relationships. We need the big picture, a guide to give us clarity so that we know, yes, relationships are really hard, but as that book reminds us, relationships are a mess worth making.
[25:29] And so Jesus, in His perfect wisdom, gives us the golden rule, this beautiful positive picture of unlimited love, and He demonstrates it in His own life as well.

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But recognize what's come before. This all begins, the picture of loving others well, it begins with the Father's love. It begins with receiving.
God has freely, generously, patiently poured out His love on you. He has sent the Son to rescue us from our self-centered pride so that flowing from that might come love, goodness, and kindness towards others.
Since I have received so much, I want to do good to others. We can't do this by ourselves. We need the power of the love of our God and Father.
It takes us to the beauty of the gospel. You know, in the gospel, we discover this wonderful message that Jesus has been teaching us of the King who is our Father, who pours out His treasure on us.
[26:46] And the greatest gift, the greatest treasure He gives is His own Son to be our Savior, to show us, to demonstrate to us what perfect love looks like.

And as He does so, and as God the Father sends His Spirit into our hearts to work that message deep into our hearts, then we have the power to change the joy of pursuing good and healthy relationships.
It is amazing to think that God has been so kind to His people that while, yes, we can't do relationships perfectly, we really can treat others in ways that are kind and loving and patient.
And we can grow and develop in that. And maybe as you look at your own life, you're so encouraged because you see that. It's amazing to think that God can use the church to let people see that His love really is powerful and life-changing.
And of course, what our confused world needs most, what we in the midst of our complicated relationships need most, is not just to hear this lesson about what perfect love looks like.
[28:13] We need to see and to experience that perfect picture of love in our own life. We need to know Jesus, the one who connected perfect love for His Father with perfect love for others.

You know, the Jesus who taught this principle also worked it out in practice. when His friends let Him down, He was patient. He was kind towards those who took Him for granted.
He prayed forgiveness even for those who were putting Him to death. And there on the cross, He suffers and dies to forgive us our mess, our sin, and to make us children of God, and to give us the love of God.
And so, knowing Jesus, relationship with Jesus, that's the one relationship that you and I need most of all.
For the sake of our own hearts and lives, for the sake of our relationships. Today, do we know Him? Are we enjoying life with Him?
[29:29] Will we receive Him today if we're not yet His followers, His people? Because He promises when we ask and seek and not, He will bring us into life with God as our Father.

He will give us His grace and love to help us today and every day and in all those relationships that you and I have.
God bless you.

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