

Monday, March 17, 2014 – Human Relationships

Developing deep, meaningful friendships is not something I am very good at. Outside of my immediate family, relationships with others were generally not something that really interested me. It might be that growing up on a farm with no one within miles around influenced my attitude. As I got older, the “go it alone, don’t need anyone else” attitude became ingrained in my being and way of life. The few times I did “let someone in,” I ended up being “disappointed” and determined the effort wasn’t worth the return. There is one major exception that I made, and it involved a man who would mentor me in church work and provide me feedback as I tried to learn how to preach God’s word. He became as close to me as my father was, yet I never did utter those three words which he deserved to hear often: “I love you.” By the time I finally expressed my feelings toward him, it was too late. I was delivering his eulogy. It wasn’t the same. His passing reinforced, in my mind, that my approach toward getting close to people was best. No love, no pain.

With the passing of my parents eighteen months ago, the outpouring of love from those at the church we attend caused me to rethink what had become a callous attitude. When I had an unexplained health scare last May, the response of love taught me that what I thought was a “protective” approach to life had actually caused me to miss 40+ years of potentially meaningful relationships. Thankfully I can now say that there are people who I consider close friends that without hesitation I would do anything for. They range in age from 28 to their 60’s. I’m sure I drive them crazy with texts, Facebook messages, etc. and if I do, forgive me, I’m new to this friend thing. ☺

You might ask what any of this has to do with messages you normally would see on this site. I have told the Sunday morning class I teach multiple times that there are many ways to teach. There is personal (one on one) Bible study, preaching and teaching a class. One of the most important ways that we teach is through our interaction with people. I wonder if we reflect on that realization.

Christ tells us in Matthew 5:13-16, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do [men] light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” How do we carry out the command to let our light shine if we choose to live our lives isolated from the rest of mankind? Choosing not to relate to others for fear of them

“disappointing” us goes against the very teaching of Christ when he says, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...”

Those that make up “all nations” may be coworkers, fellow students, ball team members, or neighbors. Whoever they may be, they can realize that they have a Christian friend that is genuinely concerned about the things going on in their lives. We must invest in the lives of others if we ever expect to gain a hearing for the Gospel we long to share. We must pursue a culture of caring which comes when building relationships. Do we feel the hurts and struggles of those around us? Are we there in times of transition and times of joy? Do we even realize that these times may be the ones in which our relationships go to another level of trust and confidence through which eventually the gospel will be shared?

When we realize that outreach is not an event, but rather a process, we will begin to develop a culture that fosters this process. Jesus modeled this ideal. He entered into the world of the twelve disciples. He identified with their pain and their broken condition; he devoted great amounts of time building his life into their lives; he committed himself to the process of evangelizing, not just an evangelistic event.

How? By being a friend first.