



What Destroys Relationships and What Builds Them?

Welcome to '40 Days of Community'! Week 3, Day 22.

We were created for community. We're wired for relationships. We're made to go through life together. The Bible says this, the top verse on your outline, **Romans 12:5** *so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.* Will you circle *'belongs to all the others'*?

Now, you may not realize it, but the people you are sitting next to, you are connected to. If you are part of the family of God, you belong to them and they belong to you. Here's the problem: It's easy to get disconnected in relationships. Would you agree with that? It's very easy to get disconnected from your children, from your parents, from your brothers and sisters, your friends, your family, your husband and wife if you're married. It's easy to get disconnected from your church, from your small group.

How many of you are in a small group? (hands) Let me give you a little secret. I want to warn you - you're going to have differences in your small group. The only people who agree on everything are dead people. So if you're getting along in perfect harmony in your group, it means either one, you're not being honest, or two, you're dead.

So today, we're going to look at how relationships get destroyed, what destroys them and what builds them? And I'm very, very excited because it has applications in so many areas of your life. You can apply it with your friends. You can apply it with your

marriage if you're married. You can apply it in your work and in your career in relating to others. You can apply it in your small group.

So what destroys relationships and how do you rebuild them, and how do you keep it from happening in the first place? It's safe to say that every relational problem comes down to one of three negative attitudes. Every problem you've had in a relationship comes as a result of one these problems. They are the enemies of community:

I. NUMBER ONE: SELFISHNESS.

SELFISHNESS destroys relationships. Now this is the number one enemy. It is the number one cause of conflict, the number one cause of arguments, the number one cause of divorce. It is the number one cause of war. **James 4** verses 1 and 2 say this, *"What causes fights and quarrels, don't they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but you don't get it."*

Now it's very easy for selfishness to creep into a relationship. You know when you start a relationship, you work real hard at being selfless or unselfish, like in dating and "Oh here, please, you go first." You know? And you are very unselfish at the start of a relationship, but then as time goes on, selfishness begins to creep in. Would you agree we put more energy into building than into maintaining relationships? Yeah, we do.

Let me share with you the five stages of a married cold.

The first year: "Baby darling, I'm worried about that sniffle. So I've called the paramedics to rush you to the Hospital for a checkup and a week of rest. And I know you don't like hospital food, so I'm having gourmet meals brought in for you." That's the first year.

Second year of a marriage: "Sweetheart, I don't like the sound of that cough. I've arranged for visiting nurses to make a house call. Let me tuck you in bed."

Third year of a marriage: "You look like you've got a fever. Why don't you drive yourself over to the walk-in clinic, get some medicine, I'll watch the kids." You know, very magnanimous.

Fourth year: "Look, be sensible. After you've fed and bathed the kids, washed the dishes, you really ought to go to bed."

Fifth year: "For Pete's sake honey, do you have to cough so loud? I can't hear the TV. Would you mind going in the

other room while this show is on? You sound like a barking dog." ¹

You know, we just stop making the effort

Now, we all know that selfishness destroys a relationship. We know this. So why don't we change, or better yet, why can't we change? Why can't we be more unselfish? Well there are a couple of reasons.

First, it is natural. It is human nature to be selfish. I don't think about you most of the time. I think about me, my needs, my interests, my hurts. How do I look? How do I feel? Who's hurt me? And you don't think about me, you think about yourself more than anybody else. You think about yourself all the time. It is natural to be selfish.

When a baby's born, they demand total attention. They don't give anything back. "Wah, I'm wet. Wah, I'm hungry." They are totally selfish creatures. It's human nature.

Now it's interesting that a lot of people say, "You know, if there is a God, why is there evil in the world?" I don't have a problem with that one. It's because we're all selfish and when I want what I want and you want what you want, it causes conflict, wars and a lot of other stuff. I want to do what I want to do, and that hurts people.

I don't have a problem with why there is evil in the world. The real issue is, the bigger issue is: Why is there good? There is only one reason there is good in the world: Because of God. Without God, there would be no good because by nature, I think of me first, not you, and so do you.

Second, not only are we naturally selfish, it is our culture. Everything in it feeds our self-centeredness. Do you realize that every advertisement that comes out caters to your self-centeredness? It's things like "Have it your way," "We do it all for you."

How about the Sprite commercial, "Obey your thirst." Think about that. "Obey your thirst." That says: Do whatever your urges are. Forget about if it hurts anybody. Forget about if it bothers anybody. You're just an animal. So obey your urge. Obey your thirst. Live for yourself, regardless of what it does to everybody else."

Let's read together **Proverbs 28:25**, "*Selfishness only causes trouble.*" (TEV) It only causes trouble.

Now here's the antidote. If selfishness destroys relationships, then **SELF-LESS-NESS** builds them. Selflessness builds relationships.

Now what does selflessness mean? It means a little bit less of me, and a little bit more of you. It means I think a little bit less of myself, and I just think a little bit more of you. That is being selfless. I'm not the whole center of the universe -- I'm thinking about other people.

Philippians 2:4 says this, *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* That's self-less-ness. Selflessness brings out the best in others. It builds relationships. Anybody can be unselfish every once in a while, but God says, "I want it to be a lifestyle." "I want it to be a lifestyle," and there's only one way: God's spirit in your life doing the growth work inside of you.

AND, if you start acting selfless in a relationship, it forces the other person to change because you're not the same person anymore, and they have to relate to you in a different way. And so selflessness not only transforms a relationship, it also transforms that person. I've actually seen it many, many, many, many, many times. I've seen some of the most unlovable, unlikable people, you know cranky people that nobody wants to be around. And you start being selfless toward them and giving them what they need, not what they deserve, and it transforms them into nice people. It transforms them when you show them selflessness, and show them kindness.

Now it's very easy to be selfless in a crowd. Like right now, nobody is requiring anything from you. It's when you're in relationship with other people that you have the give and take of learning to get along with people. That's where you have to learn to be selfless.

Now since so many of you, most of you are in small groups. I made a list of practical ways you can practice selflessness in your small group this week:

Number One: By showing up. Okay? Now I mean that, by showing up. You know, I have to admit I don't always want to go to small group. I know I need it and other people need it. But sometimes, I just don't want to expend the effort. I want to stay at home and I don't want to do anything. And so when I decide to get up and go to small

¹ [Excerpted from "The Seven Stages of a Married Cold", from Staying Close by Dennis & Barbara Rainey, Used With Permission, Word Publishing, 1989]

group. it is a *selfless* act. I am putting the needs of the group over my own personal needs. So just showing up, honestly, is an act of selflessness.

Number Two: By accepting new people in your group. That's another way you can do it. By not being a clique. You know, "Us four, no more." And you're not resentful when somebody says, "Well, let's bring somebody else in." That is an act of selflessness.

Another way is by really listening to people in your group. Do you know that listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give others? Because you're giving them your time, and that is your life. It's far more important than your money. You can always get more money but you only have a certain amount of time in life. So when you give somebody your attention and you give them your ear, you are actually giving them a part of your life. And that is selfless.

And when you really listen to people and you're not thinking, "*What am I going to say next?*" Or you're really listening and you're not multitasking, "*What do I have to do after?*" You're paying attention. You are being and practicing selflessness.

When you draw other people out to talk in your small group and you say, "Well what do you think?" and you ask questions, and you don't dominate the conversation. That is practicing selflessness.

You see, if you don't get anything else I say today, get this: The greatest lesson in life is learning to be unselfish. That's it. That's the #1 lesson in life. It's also called love. *Love your neighbor as yourself.* Once you know and love God, God says, "Now I want to you to learn to love other people," and that means being unselfish.

And unfortunately, a lot of people go through life and never learn the greatest lesson, and they waste their life. They waste the whole reason they are here on earth: To learn how to be unselfish.

Now here's the *second thing that destroys relationships*:

II. PRIDE DESTROYS RELATIONSHIPS.

In **Proverbs 13:10**, it says this, "*Pride only breeds quarrels.*" (NIV)

Now pride shows up in a lot of different ways:

- It shows up first in criticism. If you are critical of other people, if you tend to be judgmental of other people, you tend to look down at other people, you tend to be a picky, picky perfectionist -- you have a pride problem. That's the reason you are critical: you have a pride problem.
- If you tend to be competitive and you're always comparing, "Oh look at her dress, compared to my dress." Or, "Look at his car compared to my car." Or you're always comparing salaries or you're comparing children or you're comparing titles or jobs or anything... you know what? You have a pride problem. That comparing spirit, of always looking at everybody else and comparing and judging, that is a pride problem.
- If you find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry." If you find it difficult, you choke on your apologies, you cannot ever admit it when you're wrong. You have a pride problem.
- If you have shallow relationships and you keep everything superficial in your life, and you never let anybody get close to you, and you keep them at an arm's distance. And you keep faking it a lot, and you wear a mask -- you have a pride problem. You see when you're too shallow to care about others, that is pride.

Now what does pride look like in a small group?

- Well, one of the ways it looks is *when you always have to tell a story that tops the last story.* "Well you did that. Well, listen to this one." Okay?
- *When you are always offering advice and you never ask for it in your group.*
- When you never admit when you've had a tough week, everybody else is saying, "Yeah I've had a tough week." And you never admit any problem in your life.

The problem with pride is it's self-deceiving. Everybody else can see it but we can't. When I'm full of pride, I can't see it in my life.

So the Bible says this in **Proverbs 16:18**, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.* And I love this verse in The Message paraphrased: *First pride then the crash, the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.*

So what's the antidote? Pride destroys relationships. **HUMILITY** builds them. That's the antidote to pride. Listen to these five things that build relationships in **1 Peter 3:8**. The Bible says there, *Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.* Those five really are built on the fifth one, the ability to be humble.

This is really a pretty good model for small groups. If you take a look at these five things, it's what we all want to be doing in our families and our groups and our relationships. We want to live in harmony and be sympathetic, love each other. We want to have compassion and be humble.

I want you to notice that first one particularly, *"Live in harmony."* That's what God wants in relationships. He doesn't want this unison where we're all the same. He wants the harmony when we're all different. Why be in a relationship if we weren't different from the other people? That's what we draw from.

In a symphony, the beauty isn't all the different instruments playing their own thing. That's why I think orchestras always have that "tuneup" before they play. It sounds awful. Just noise.

But then they began the symphony and they play together, with harmony and it's magnificent! The "tuneup" show the beauty of playing together.

And this is important: Harmony and humility go together. You have to have them together.

How are you and I going to grow in humility? Because that's a tall order. How does that happen in our lives? It happens by letting Jesus Christ begin to control our thoughts and hearts and attitudes and reactions. He has got to be a part of this. The Bible says over in **Ephesians 4:23-24** *²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* How do I become a new person? How do I start to think in a different way?

Basic law of relationships is this: I tend to become like the people I spend time with. Spend time with grumpy people, you get more grumpy. Spend time with happy people, you get more happy. You want to have more humility, spend time with Jesus Christ because he is humble. He wants a relationship with you. He wants you and I to spend time with him in prayer and reading his word and

talking to him. He is humble. Look at this next verse in the outline, Philippians 2:3 and then 5 and 6, *"Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Your attitude should be the same as that the Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God."*

No one has ever done anything more humble than Jesus, coming from heaven to earth to become a man to live for us, give his life for us, be resurrected for us. And as I spend time around him, that enables me to begin to become more humble and that builds relationships.

There is a third struggle we all face, and that is the struggle of resentment.

III. RESENTMENT DESTROYS RELATIONSHIPS.

The Bible says this, **Job 5:2** *²Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.*

Now everybody blows it. We all make mistakes. We all sin. I sin. You sin. Everybody does. I don't bat 1000. I don't measure up to God's standard. I don't even measure up to my own standards. I disappoint myself a lot of the times."

So because we're all imperfect, you're going to hurt other people and other people are going to hurt you in life, intentionally and unintentionally. So you're going to be hurt. You're going to be hurt in life, that's a fact.

What's more important is, *what do you do with that hurt?* What you do with it is more important than the hurt. Are you going to allow it to make you better? Or bitter, resentful, and carry a grudge?

Now the Bible tells us and history and personal experience tells us that opposites attract, opposites attract and then when they get married, opposites attack.

What fascinated you now irritates you. This happens all the time. You see, when you are single and you look out there and you see somebody who is not like you, that is fascinating. You know, like a person who is kind of quiet says, "Look at that person, how outgoing! How full of life and vivacious they are," and you find it attractive because it's not like you.

And so then you get in a relationship or you get married, and then after about a year, you're going, "Do you have to be loud all the time?" And it starts getting on your nerves. It starts irritating you, and I now as I said you're trapped and then you attack.

Truth time. How many of you marrieds had unrealistic expectations in your marriage? It's true. And it's a setup for resentment.

Now often, it's not the big things in life that make us resentful. Those can obviously, and do. But it's also a lot of little things that just pile up, and you just start piling them up. And a lot of little things can break the camel's back. So we get irritated. And those irritations when we hold on to them turn into resentment.

Now again, since we're all in small groups, I wrote some common irritations in life to be looking out for in small groups.

- First is the person who is always late, and then they take 10 minutes to explain why they were late in the middle of the group;
- the person who talks too long, they love to hear themselves talk;
- the TMI, the "too much information" person, especially about a surgery of a relative.
- The person who's dogmatic and says, "This is the way it is," and you say, "Well I guess that discussion just ended."
- The joker. The person who turns every statement into a wisecrack. He thinks he's a stand-up comedian and that the group is comedy club.
- The EGRs, the extra grace required. In most groups, there is somebody who doesn't catch all of the social signals, they are "heavenly sandpaper." They grate on you. Right now, you're thinking of the person in your group right now. In fact, if you can't think of anyone, guess what? You're it.

Now let me clarify something: Anger is not always wrong. Resentment is always wrong. When I see injustice in the world, I better get angry. Sometimes anger is a result of love. If you hurt my kids, I'd get angry. That's a legitimate anger. In fact, the Bible says, "*Be angry and sin not.*" In other words, there is a way to get angry and not sin. But resentment is always wrong. It's when you pile up anger in your heart. It's frozen anger.

You're not hurting them with resentment. You're hurting yourself far more than you're hurting them. And so you get tied up in a knot because you hold it in, or sometimes, you express it in the wrong way and you do something really stupid and dumb. You don't think straight. The most foolish things that have ever been done in history have been done in revenge or in retaliation or in resentment.

Notice what the Bible says, **Psalm 73:21-22** ²¹*When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,* ²²*I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.* In other words, I didn't think straight and I started doing senseless, self-defeating behavior. God says, "I don't want you to do that."

One of the purposes of the small group is to help you think straight when you've been hurt. Because when you get hurt, you need other people around you, who can think unemotionally and more rationally. And you come to group and you go, "You know what, I had this thing today and ... I want to ring that guy's neck!" And they're going, "Now, did you really want a lawsuit? And have you thought about this?"

You need other people. You're going to be hurt in life. And when you start to get bitter and you don't think straight, you need people who are not bitter around you to help you think it through and keep you from doing dumb things. Does that make sense? That's what the Bible says.

Hebrews 12:15 ¹⁵*See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.* "

So when somebody is hurting in a group, you gather around them and you help them and you keep them from getting bitter against it. See, this is how we grow.

So what's the antidote? **The antidote to resentment is forgiveness.** FORGIVENESS builds relationships just like resentment tears it down. And if you're going to have a long-term, lasting marriage that lasts your entire life, you're going to need massive doses of forgiveness, massive doses of forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13, would you read this verse aloud with me? **Colossians 3:13** ¹³*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Now, why should I forgive other people? Well, there are three reasons: First, resentment doesn't work, it only makes you miserable. And so holding onto a grudge, you're only hurting yourself with your anger. Second, you have been forgiven by God. And third, you're going to need more forgiveness in the future and so you better offer it to others.

We pray the Lord's prayer, "*Forgive us our debts, our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.*" God, I want you to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else. "Whoa, do I really want that?" You see, we forgive because God says you need to forgive for your own sake. You say, "Dave, I can't do it. I just... I cannot forgive that person." *That's why you need Jesus Christ. That's why you need Jesus Christ because you're right, you can't do it on your own.* Human love runs out. You need God's supernatural love in you.

Look at this next verse, **Titus 3:3-7** *³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* You need to experience God in your life. You'll never be able to let it go until you get God's love in you every day and every moment.

Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to let off the hook? Now let me explain what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not making excuses; and so for that person who hurt you, they hurt you and it was real. Forgiveness is not minimizing the hurt. It hurt. Forgiveness is not justifying it, saying it was no big deal. It was a big deal. Forgiveness is not saying it wasn't wrong. It was wrong.

So what is forgiveness? **Forgiveness is letting go of the pain and letting go of my right to get even.** Why would anybody do that? For your own sake. Because you are living in misery the longer you hold it on.

Some of you are still allowing people from your past to hurt you in the present. And every time you hold onto that grudge, you are perpetuating your own pain. The past can't hurt you anymore. It only hurts you if you refuse to let it go. You hold onto it as a grudge in resentment.

You are hurting yourself, and God says, "You've got to let it go." You've got to let it go. Forgiveness is the only way to get on with your life. Do they deserve it? No. Do YOU deserve to be forgiven by God? No. But God did it anyway out of his grace and kindness.

God wants to start something totally new in your life today, right in the middle of '40 Days of Community' and it starts with opening up your life to Jesus Christ and letting him fill you with his love on a moment-by-moment basis. Let's bow our heads.

As we close, let me ask you three very personal questions. First, who do you need to be more unselfish with?

And, who have you been critical or judgmental of? Have you been unwilling to admit "I was wrong, I'm sorry, please forgive me?" Who do you need to say that to? "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

And, Who do you need to forgive?

You know, all three of the antidotes to resentment and selfishness and pride, all three of the antidotes are found in a relationship to Jesus Christ. You get that relationship lined up, all your other ones will fall into place. You need to allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord, the manager, the boss of your life. Let him fill you with his love and you'll start to have great relationships with other people.

So pray this prayer, in your heart, "*Dear Jesus, You've seen every relationship I've ever had, the good, the bad and the ugly. And you know how selfishness, and pride, and insecurity and resentment messes them up. I admit that I need your help, Jesus, in my life and in my relationships. So as much as I understand, I ask you Jesus to come into my life and live through me, and put your love through me. I want that fresh start that you offer. In your name I pray, Amen.*"