

The Most Important Ingredient to a Healthy Relationship

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That They May Be One
Philippians 2:1-11

If you are at all in touch with American culture over the last 20 years or so, you know that there is an enormous appetite for information about relationships – how to find a relationship, how to keep a relationship, how to heal a relationship. There are 30,000 books listed on Amazon about finding love. There are 90,000 books about relationship help. There are 70,000 titles on dating. There are several hundred thousand books on marriage and marital help.

I looked up some of the titles of relationship books. Here's a good title:

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Calling in "The One": 7 Weeks to Attract the Love of Your Life

If seven weeks is too long, then you could buy this one:

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Mr. Right, Right Now! How a Smart Woman Could Land her Dream Man in 6 weeks

Or how about this:

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Swipe to The Altar: Your 10-Step Roadmap to Finding True Love Online

Of course, because so many relationships begin with texting, here's a title you might want to get:

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Texts So Good He Can't Ignore: Sassy Texting Secrets for Attracting High-Quality Men (and Keeping the One You Want)

Of course, the books aren't written just for women. Here's a great book, single men.

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Make Her Chase You: The Simple Strategy to Attract Women

I'm not sure what that strategy is. I know you that if you want to attract men you should spray yourself in bacon-scented perfume. Here's one more that I loved:

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Smart: Find the One you Want, Fix the One You've Got

That's a very wise title. How to fix another person. As Dr. Phil used to say: How's that working for you?

With such an abundance of counsel about relationships, why anyone in America would be struggling at all. All of these books and reality TV shows and websites and relationship seminars and family and marital therapists – they are all pointing to one obvious fact: everyone wants good relationships! Is there anyone listening to me right now who says: I don't want to have healthy relationships? Is there anyone listening who would raise their hand and say: You know, I really like a lot of tension and being uncomfortable around people who are close to me! I enjoy bad communication! I like being misunderstood and judged! Give me turmoil any day! I really appreciate suspicion and conflict and jealousy! There are few things that I look forward to more than a good lawsuit. Being sued, fighting in court, taking depositions, settlement negotiations. I tell you there's nothing that gets my blood pumping in the morning than a really nasty court fight.

And, if it's personal – if it involves a former business partner or someone who was a dear friend or, God willing, an ex-spouse who's suing for full custody – that to me is like winning the lottery! I can guarantee there's no one listening to me right now who wants a bad relationship. There's nothing more draining, more exhausting, more painful than a bad relationship.

So, I want to ask a simple question today. This is especially for any of you who have read the relationship books or the advice columns or if you've turned to a well-meaning friend to get counsel about a difficult relationship. I just want to ask you a simple question today. Is there one bottom line requirement to relational health? If you took all the counsel and all the advice in all the books and you said "Is there one thing that's necessary to heal a broken relationship?" What would that one thing be?

Let me turn the question around. Is there one thing that will destroy a relationship? One thing that will keep people from resolving their conflicts? One thing that will keep people from hearing each other, listening to what another person has to say or considering their perspectives? Is there one thing that breaks down marriages and breaks down friendships and breaks down churches? In Christian terms, is there one sin above every other sin that has wrecked your relationships in the past or is wrecking your relationships right now? The answer is yes. There is one great sin that destroys relationships.

C.S. Lewis, who I've told you many, many times is my favorite Christian author, this past year, I've reread much of the writings of Lewis. He's certainly in the mix of Christians

who had the greatest impact on the world in the 20th century. C.S. Lewis said that pride is “the great sin”. I think that every Christian should read his chapter “The Great Sin” in Lewis’ book, *Mere Christianity*.

Here’s what Lewis said there:

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According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...it is Pride which has been the key cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.

And C.S. Lewis is not just offering us his private opinion. He is summarizing the teaching of the great saints over the centuries. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther and John Calvin and many others have said exactly the same thing. Pride is the great sin. Pride is the number one cause for relational breakdown. And, in contrast, humility is the single most important ingredient in healing a relational breach and bringing about relational unity.

In this incredibly divided world with all of our political and social and racial divisions, we decided to do a series before this upcoming election called “That They May Be One”. This was Jesus’ great prayer on the night that he was betrayed, that his followers would be marked by unity. That’s why we’re doing a series on unity. Today, I want to continue in that series with a talk titled “The Most Important Ingredient to a Healthy Relationship”. Let’s pray.

Slide Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Paul, in this section of Scripture, directly addresses the issue of unity and specifically the one thing that will destroy a church, the one thing that will destroy a marriage, the one thing that will destroy your relationships in the office or in family, and the one main way to heal disunity. Let’s look at verse 3 again:

Slide Philippians 2:3

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

Here, I think the Apostle Paul gives us

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The definition of pride

People hear that in Christianity pride is considered a great sin. Lots of folks struggle with that. They don't understand what Christians mean by pride. Christians are not opposed to self-respect or self-esteem. Self-respect and self-esteem are essential ingredients in building relational health. When C.S. Lewis called pride the great sin, what Lewis is referencing is Paul's statement here in Philippians 2:3 where he says:

Slide Philippians 2:3

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

"Selfish ambition" in the original Greek meant a greedy attempt to gain the upper hand. In other words, trying in every situation to end up on top. To try to win in every relationship. As Lewis puts it, "Pride, sinful pride, is essentially competitive." A prideful person gets no pleasure from their personal possessions or their position unless those things make that person feel superior to someone else.

A wealthy businessman bought an expensive yacht some years ago. He said, "Actually I hate boating. The first time I was on a yacht, I couldn't wait to get off. The reason I bought this huge yacht is because I love the feeling of giving other yacht owners an inferiority complex as my yacht roars by and practically swamps their boats." That's the picture of sinful pride. I can't just enjoy a really nice boat or a really nice car or a really nice house! What I really enjoy is having a nicer boat, a nicer car, a nicer house than other people. It's not enough for me to make \$100,000 or \$1,000,000 or \$1,000,000,000. I'm only content if I make more money than you.

It's not enough to be smart. I need to be smarter than you. It's not enough for my kids to be doing well. They have to be doing better than yours. My office has to be bigger than yours. My grades have to be higher than yours. It is pride that makes us feel bad when anyone gets ahead of us.

Sometimes, sinful pride is really obvious. Muhammad Ali used to famously say, "I'm the greatest!" Winston Churchill famously said,

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We're all worms, but I do believe that I'm a glow worm.

Sometimes, pride is all swagger and bluster. But very often pride is hidden and we don't detect it in ourselves. Let's talk for a moment about the disguises of pride.

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The disguises of pride

Pride that destroys relationships comes in an infinite array of disguises. Pride masks itself so that sometimes we don't see it in ourselves. Depending upon our own temperament, our own particular gifts and talents, pride wears a different mask.

You may be one of those people who consider themselves to be a loving caregiver. You love counseling people, you love caring for people in need. Where does pride show up in your life? It shows up when you believe that you know better what someone else needs than they know themselves. Your pride may cause you to want to control the choices of someone else – even an adult child or a friend or your spouse. You may become manipulative in trying to draw the person to yourself rather than having them rely on the Lord or depend on other people. You want to be the center of everyone's life.

Or perhaps you are a person who sees yourself as successful, as an achiever. How does pride show up in your life? Your pride may cause you to never admit your weaknesses or your failures. You may try to promote yourself by bragging about your achievements or exaggerating your successes. Have you ever found yourself exaggerating to the point of lying about something you did or something you know? Do you know anyone who has a hard time apologizing or admitting when they're wrong? Do you have a mirror handy because you may find that person there?

Perhaps you consider yourself intelligent and well-read. Your pride may drive you to always try to be the smartest, best read person in the room.

If you are a strong, confident leader or self-assured or full of conviction, your pride may cause you to believe that you are always right. You don't need to listen to the opinions of other people. You can become overbearing and demanding.

Depending on your particular temperament, pride may be hiding behind a different kind of mask in your life than in someone else's life. But I can make you this 100% money-back guarantee that as a sinful human being, you absolutely struggle with pride and pride has been at the core of relational breakdowns between you and someone else.

So, what is the difference between pride and humility?

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The difference between pride and humility

Let's look at verse 4:

Slide Philippians 2:4

⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

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Pride says life is all about me

So many of our relational and psychological problems are actually a manifestation of pride. A famous Harvard psychologist said this:

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Any neurotic is living a life which in some respects is extreme in its self-centeredness...the cause of their misery represents a complete preoccupation with themselves. The very nature of the neurotic disorder is pride. If the sufferer is hypersensitive, resentful, fault-finding, critical, they may be indicating a fear that they will not appear to advantage in competitive situations where they want to show their work. If they are chronically indecisive, they are showing fear that they may do the wrong thing and be discredited. If they are overly scrupulous and self-critical, they may be endeavoring to show how praise-worthy they really are. Thus, most neurosis, are, from the point of view of religion, mixed up with the sin of pride.

Pride says life is all about me: my needs, my opinion, my desires, what you think of me, what about my position, my promotion? What about my title? What about how I'm treated? Humility says life is all about us.

Slide Philippians 2:4

⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Have you ever said to yourself: you know, I'm in this conflict, but I want to consider this other person's viewpoint. I want to consider their needs, their perspectives. I want to walk in their shoes for a while. How hard is that to do? Really hard! Because sinful pride rears its ugly head and says what about me? Who's going to pay attention to me? Someone has to look out for #1 and it's clearly not going to be them.

How do we get ourselves to be genuinely others centered and not completely self-centered? Let me offer you what may be for some of you a really novel thought: the Bible is not meant to be doable apart from God's provision of power through the Holy Spirit. You see, this book called the Bible is not a book filled with helpful principles that you can just take to the world and say, "Hey, America, this is the way you ought to live!" Have you ever tried to actually do what Jesus tells you to do in the Bible? For example, have you ever tried to actually love your enemies? Or have you ever tried to put into practice Jesus' statement in Luke 17 that says this:

Slide Luke 17:3b-4

"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

Forgive people over and over again! You can't do it and neither can I! Not without God's help! And we can't have real humility – where we consider another person's viewpoint and not just our own – without God's help. Pray for the grace to not just think about yourself. You've got to pray for the gift of humility. It's not natural. Humility is a spiritual gift. What's the difference between pride and humility?

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Pride says I am equal to God

Slide Philippians 2:6

⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

Isn't pride the sin that made the devil the devil? He wanted to be equal with God. He wasn't content to be a servant. Pride says there is a God and I am he! We want to be able to control everything. We ought to be able to manage any problem. We ought to be able to work without resting and never get exhausted. We ought to be all-knowing. That's why I beat myself up because I just didn't know, because I made a mistake. I didn't see the future.

And in our relationships pride says, "You blew it and I will play the role of God in your life and judge you. I am superior to you and will stand over you in judgment.

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Humility says I will let go of my claim to be God

One of the prerogatives Jesus let go of when he was on the earth was his right to judge others. Jesus said in John's gospel: "I judge no one!" And in John 3:17 we read:

Slide John 3:17

¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The Apostle Paul says in verse 5:

Slide Philippians 2:5

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. The attitude that he's talking about is humility. St. Augustine once wrote:

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The way of Christ is in the first place, humility; in the second place, humility; in the third place, humility...as often as you say to me about the Christian religion's norm of conduct, I chose to give no other answer than this: *humility!*

If you really want to end a conflict with someone else you have to let go of your right to be this other person's judge and to hold their sin over them! We've got to stop trying to be God who is the world's only judge. Humility simply sounds like "I'm not your judge! I won't stand above you! You don't have to answer to me!"

Finally,

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Pride says: I am the master of my life

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I am the master of my fate
I am the captain of my soul

This is the way we are taught success in America. You take an inventory of your gifts and your passions. Some business consultant tells you who you are. Then you come up with some sort of life plan, some sort of strategy to achieve your goals. If you're getting older, maybe you put together your bucket list of what you want in life. Before you die you want a sports car. I've always wanted this kind of car, I'm going out and buying it. I want this sort of vacation house. I want to retire in this beautiful location. I'm going to visit this place. Humility says: Forget about my bucket list!

Humility says:

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Jesus is the master of my life

I'm going to go out and find the love of my life. I'm not the master of my fate. I'm not self-created. I have a purpose – God's purpose – humility.

Slide Philippians 2:9-11

- ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
- ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

My first pastor when I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior at age 18, he wasn't an educated man. He worked in steel mills most of his life in Cleveland and he pastored on the side. He was in his mid-fifties before he ever got a full-time job as a pastor. This man – Warren Campbell – raised up a generation of young people to understand this one thing: Jesus is Christ is Lord and you are not.

At age 18 I got it! Jesus has the right to call the shots in my life. I don't. That's what it means to be a Christian. As John Wimber used to put it, we are just loose change in the pockets of the Lord. He gets to spend us any way he wants. It really doesn't matter what you want to do to make yourself feel important or achieve your dreams or reach for the stars. What matters in life is serving the purposes of the Lord.

Do you want to have a church that's unified? Do you want to have small groups that are unified? Do you want to have a marriage that is unified? Relationships that are unified? Humility in our relationships is the key. And in our relationships, what if in humility we simply said to Jesus – "Lord, I'm at your disposal. I'm available to serve your purposed. If you want me to reach out to this person in my small group who is estranged from the church, I'll do that. If you want me to reach out to a difficult family member that everyone else has written off, I'll do that. If you want me to forgive someone for what they did or disclose to someone my own failures or confess my sins to someone and be vulnerable and weak – I'll do that! You, Jesus, are Lord! I humbly bow my knee before you!

So let me ask you a question. When is the last time you bowed your knee and your heart before Jesus and said: Jesus, I really want you to be my Lord. Be the Master of my life! I give you the right to call the shots!

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- II. The disguises of pride
- III. The difference between pride and humility
 - A. Pride says life is all about me
 - B. Pride says I am equal to God
 - C. Humility says I will let go of my claim to be God
 - D. Pride says: I am the master of my life
 - E. Humility says: Jesus is the master of my life