

Grace-Filled Relationships

Ephesians 4:1-16, 25-32

In this series, *God and the Rest of the Week*, our goal is to **apply the gospel to every part of our lives**. We saw two weeks ago how God **created each of us on purpose**. You are not a mistake, you are a masterpiece, a custom work of art, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Last week we saw how **the church is central** to God's work in the world. We are not isolated individuals trying to change the world for Jesus, we are part of His One Body in the world, working together to honor Him and let the light of His glory shine through us!

Today we apply the gospel to **our relationships**. As we walk through Ephesians 4, 5 and 6 we will come to learn what it means to "apply the gospel." That is precisely what Paul does.

Ephesians 1-3

What God has DONE

He has

- Loved us (ch. 1)
- Saved us (ch. 2)
- United us (ch. 2-3)
 - ***in Christ***

Ephesians 4-6

What we must DO

Therefore, live

- Worthy (4:1)
- Holy (4:17)
- Lovingly (5:1)
- Truthfully (5:8)
- Wisely (5:15)

For three chapters he has **explained the gospel** - what it means to be loved by God, raised to new life in Christ and united us into His body. Then for three chapters he says, "THEREFORE, LIVE" this way. He shows **how the gospel has changed us and how we should live differently** as those who have been transformed in Christ. We are not who we were. We have been made new in Christ. We need to KNOW the gospel, believe the gospel and APPLY the gospel - living in light of the truth of all God has done for us.

Let's apply the gospel to our relationships today. We will see three ways our relationships have been transformed by the gospel - **three commitments** we should make in our relationships as those who belong to Jesus.

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

1. Connect Compassionately -

“Walk in a manner worthy... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.” Eph. 4:1-2

What a description of Christian relationships! “**All** humility and gentleness... patience, bearing with one another.” Let’s *feel the weight of these instructions*. The call to Christian community is not to some minor behavior modifications - it is a total transformation of how we relate to each other.

- How should a Christian husband treat his wife? With ALL HUMILITY and gentleness.
- How should a Christian wife treat her husband? With patience, bearing with him in love.
- How should we approach people in our Community Groups? With all humility and gentleness, patience, forbearance and understanding.

Notice how this whole chapter is about relationships, in v. 32:

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

1. Connect Compassionately -

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Eph. 4:32

The chapter concludes with a string of straight up commands that all apply to our relationships:

- Put away falsehood and speak truth.
- Be angry but do not sin.
- Do honest work, don’t steal.
- Don’t tear people down with your words - be sure you build them up with your words.
- Get rid of all bitterness, anger and slander;
- Instead be kind and compassionate to one another.

Do you see **the standard for our relationships**? It is incredibly high! In fact, it could not be higher. The standard for our relationships is *God Himself*. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in perfect, loving unity, that is the calling to which we have been called. We have been drawn into the life of the Godhead.

When you get invited to a special meeting, **don’t you dress up for that meeting?**

- Say you have an interview or sales presentation for a fortune 500 company where they will all be in professional attire - wouldn’t you wear your nicest suit?
- If you had the chance to meet British Royalty in Buckingham Palace - or, better yet, the cast of Downton Abbey - wouldn’t you be sure you looked nice?

We have been connected with the God of the universe! Do we “dress ourselves” accordingly? I’m obviously not talking about our physical clothing. I’m talking about how we treat each other. The Church of Jesus Christ is the most prestigious institution on the planet. We are the body of Jesus Christ. And Paul is calling us to “***dress appropriately***” for the meeting we’ve been invited to.

And look at the how he applies the gospel here:

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

1. Connect Compassionately - as those who have been infinitely loved
“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” Eph. 4:1

We have been CALLED into the very presence of God. We have been adopted into His family - chosen before the creation of the world to belong to Him. We have been blessed with “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” We are those who have been loved INFINITELY.

So we must walk WORTHY of that calling. We don’t walk worthy in order to EARN that calling. We walk worthy of the calling to which we have already been called.

Let’s get theological for a minute. The CALL of God, named the **Effectual Call**, is about His choice. God chose you. Not because you were so amazing, but because He is so merciful. He chose us to showcase His glory, not to showcase our impressiveness. If you and I were on display it would be a museum of sin, failure and wretchedness. God did not choose us to show off US. He chose us to show off HIMSELF. He called you - as your Good Shepherd - and since you were already chosen to be His sheep, you heard His voice and you came.

Notice how ***salvation is entirely God’s work*** from beginning to end - it is “not by works so that no one can boast.” Paul describes it in Romans 8 - “those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).

As those who have been infinitely loved by God, we should be patient and understanding, humble and gentle, kind and compassionate with one another. That’s the first commitment of a Christian relationship. Who do you need to connect with compassionately this week?

Have you been harsh with someone lately? Have you been short with your husband or wife? Have you been irritable, not handling your frustrations well? Have you been treating your family with ALL HUMILITY and ALL GENTLENESS, being kind and understanding, patient and loving? Have you been loving others in the same way God has loved you?

Brother, sister, think about how God has loved you. The humility of Jesus in coming to save you. The gentleness of Jesus that He did not condemn you for your sin but bore your sin on His body. The patience of Jesus that He does not crush you when you fail but gives you another chance, and

another chance, and another. The compassion of Jesus - how perfectly understanding He is of you, sympathizing with your every hardship and hangup.

Is that how we love each other? Do we really appreciate how we have been loved?

Apply the gospel to your relationships! First that means to connect with people compassionately. Second:

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

2. Forgive Freely

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Eph. 4:32

We are to love as we have been loved, and to forgive as we have been forgiven. The gospel applies to every part of our lives - every relationship in our lives. But the most central application of the gospel is in forgiveness.

What was the main thing you needed from God? Forgiveness.

You had failed Him completely. He set a standard for doing what is right and good - and you had consistently failed to do the good and avoid the bad. Over and over. You deserved nothing but judgment. And so did I. We were DEAD in our sins. We were covered in our own failure, guilt and shame.

And that is precisely where God met us. He washed us off. He gave us a fresh start. We were born again - like messy, helpless little babies. And God graciously raised us up, helping us grow toward maturity in Christ.

God has forgiven us more than we can ever really appreciate. And He continues to forgive and forgive every single day. How has God forgiven us? COMPLETELY. Permanently. Eternally.

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

2. Forgive Freely - as those who have been completely forgiven

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Eph. 4:32

We should be kind and tenderhearted to the sinners around us because we know that we, too, are sinners who depend entirely on God's grace.

Think of the fact that God has forgiven you COMPLETELY. All of your sin - past, present and future - all of your sin, not in part, but the whole - was nailed to the cross at the moment you

called on Jesus to save you. All of it was removed from your account and applied to His account. You don't bear the weight of that sin anymore. He bore it all for you.

Sin creates a debt. Someone had to pay that debt. Jesus paid it all for you.

So how should we treat people who sin against us? You and I are those who have been forgiven 100 million dollars. When someone commits **a \$10 sin** against us, why do we get so irritated? Why is it so hard to get past it?

It's hard because forgiveness is hard. C.S. Lewis said, "***Forgiveness seems like a lovely idea until you have something to forgive.***" The need to forgive someone means they HURT you. They did damage. To forgive that hurt means YOU pay the price for THEIR sin. That's hard. Lovely idea when WE receive the grace. Expensive idea when we must GIVE the grace.

Look at the four promises of forgiveness from The Peacemaker:

The Four Promises of Forgiveness

1. I will not dwell on this incident.
2. I will not bring it up or use it against you
3. I will not talk to others about it
4. I will not let it stand between us

The Peacemaker, Ken Sande

Take an **extreme example**: a \$1 million sin. Your husband commits adultery. Your wife runs off with another man. Your business partner steals half of the profits for the year from the company.

Ok. ***You immediately feel the cost.*** These are SERIOUSLY expensive sins. You aren't just going to sit down with your husband or wife and say, "It's all good. Don't worry about it." Right? You aren't going to email your business partner and say, "No worries." You can't just walk it off.

Seeing those four promises you realize that to pronounce forgiveness will cost you. A lot.

When a spouse has been unfaithful - whether with a live person or with digital people - it is not easy for the offended party to not dwell on that. It is not easy to not bring it up. It is not easy to not talk with others about it. And it very definitely stands in the way of the relationship.

When something goes wrong at work and a big mistake is made that costs tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars - are you going to be able to just NOT think about it? Hey, stop dwelling on that! You can't. It affects everything in your day to day life.

The 4 promises show us the COST of forgiveness. To say to someone, "I forgive you," is to say, "I will pay the price for your sin." That is what grace does. Justice says, "YOU must pay for your sin." You want to punish and make them suffer, to earn back your good favor.

The only way to forgive someone is to focus on how much YOU have been forgiven by God. The ***deeper the wound the higher the price tag.***

- Some of you have been abused.
- Some of you had seriously bad childhood experiences.
- Some of you suffered for decades in difficult marriages.
- Some of you are in difficult marriages right now.
- Some of you are estranged from your grown children.
- Some of you have had some bad business dealings that were someone else's fault.

It's so easy for me to read Ephesians 4:32 and say FORGIVE FREELY.

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

2. Forgive Freely - as those who have been completely forgiven

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you." Eph. 4:32

But the truth is - forgiveness is not free. It is profoundly expensive. So the only way YOU can pay that kind of price for someone else is when you realize the full cost of what God paid for you. We only have a chance to begin the forgiveness process when we are gospel people - when our hearts and minds are filled up with the wonder of God's grace.

We are those who have been completely forgiven. Forgiven people are FORGIVING people. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm saying it's POSSIBLE and it's NECESSARY because of Jesus. If you are hurting right now and this verse is hitting you hard - take a deep breath. Think of that person who hurt you and commit - right now - to being kind and compassionate to him or her. Commit to START the process of healing and restoration that will lead you - EVENTUALLY - to pronounce them forgiven. The deeper the wound the higher the price and the longer it might take for you to get there. But you can and MUST get there.

"Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping others will die." Don't live in the land of unforgiveness. There is only death and misery there. The word "forgive" means RELEASE. And the main person who gets set free when you forgive is YOU.

God set you free from a debt you could never have paid. Know that. Believe it deep in your bones. And then apply that grace to the people in your life. Connect compassionately. Forgive freely.

Third:

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

3. Pursue Progress - as those who have been declared righteous

“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Eph. 4:12

We are called to love one another, forgive one another and build up one another. Do you feel the *gospel motivation* for these?

- As we have been loved, we love.
- As we have been forgiven, we forgive.
- And as those who have been built up in Christ, we build others up.

Look at **the goal** to which believers are called!

“Building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Eph. 4:12-13

Maturity in the faith means we grow up into **Christ-likeness** - we become more and more like Jesus. In other words, we get closer and closer to PERFECTION. What is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ? *Perfection!*

That is the goal we are to strive for - and, brother, sister - it is the goal we will ATTAIN and enjoy for all of eternity. One day, believer, ***you will be GLORIFIED!*** All of your remaining sin will be purged away and you will become like Jesus in the moment you see Him face to face.

In the meantime, Jesus is building you up - growing you to become more and more like Him.

It’s like your big brother has given you his clothes saying, ***“You’ll grow into them.”*** They don’t fit yet, but one day they will. Apply the gospel here:

What we HAVE in Christ	What we NEED from Christ
“To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Eph. 3:19	“Building up the body of Christ, until we all attain... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Eph. 4:12-13

In Christ ***we already HAVE the fullness of God in us.*** We are IN CHRIST. What that means is that all of His resources are now OURS. We are IN HIM and He is IN US. We already have access to the fullness of God. But we must still grow up into that fullness. The clothing of Christ is already ours - but we have to grow into it. It’s still pretty baggy.

We need to grow individually closer to Jesus and to help build each other up. We are **“body building”** spiritually speaking. This takes effort and it is a team sport. I haven’t done any real weight lifting since college - and even then I don’t know that you would call it “body building.” But I did gymnastics in high school and my goal in that was not to become a great gymnast - I knew I didn’t have the body type for that. My goal was to build up some muscle mass. I was 100 pounds soaking wet as a freshman - smallest guy on the soccer team. And for some cruel prank they lined us up to document that fact.

My older brother got into swimming and **gymnastics** and he had some muscles. I wasn’t about to wear a speedo, so I joined the gymnastics team. Freshman year wasn’t much to talk about. But by my junior and senior year you might have looked at me and said, “Maybe that guy worked out - a little.” I was maybe up to a buck 50 by the time I graduated. Now you know why I played soccer, not football.

But there are a few things I learned about working out.

To Build Up Your Body:

1. It helps to have a program
 2. It helps to have a coach
 3. It helps to have a team
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1. It helps to have **a program**. Just randomly doing some push-ups and sit ups won’t produce the results of a formal program, put together by someone who knows what they are doing.
 2. It helps to have **a coach**. Working with someone who knows your sport and has competed in it at a high level is critical for success in that sport. And
 3. It helps to be on **a team**. Having others beside you who are sweating and hurting - and improving - provides necessary motivation to stick with it.

I’m sure we’ve all tried various exercise programs, and learned these lessons ourselves. The principles also apply spiritually. If you want to grow spiritually, you need a program, a coach and a team. Look again at v. 12.

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

3. Pursue Progress - as those who have been declared righteous
“And he gave the apostles, the prophets... and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Eph. 4:11-12

This is why God gave us leaders in the church - to serve as COACHES for us. They don’t DO the work for us - they EQUIP all of us to do the work. What would you think of a High School gymnastics coach if he never let his kids compete, but always jumped out on the apparatus and

showed off his own skills? The goal of a coach is to prepare athletes to succeed THEMSELVES. That is our role as the leaders of your church.

We provide motivation, encouragement, programs and connections to help you grow. But YOU have to do the work. No one can grow closer to Jesus for you. Just as you have to build up your own physical body, so you have to build up your own spiritual body. But you will do that much more effectively if you have **a program, a coach and a team.**

One more application, from v. 29:

Three Commitments in our Relationships:

3. Pursue Progress - as those who have been declared righteous

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.” Eph. 4:29, NIV

Our words should support the goal of building up the body of Christ. We should not be those who tear others down with our words, but those who build others up. Think of a good coach. You push your players to be better. You keep them humble and don't let them think they are all that - but you are careful, especially with younger kids, never to tear them down. Encourage, don't discourage. Build up, don't tear down. Warm fuzzies. Not cold pricklies.

We are those who have been declared righteous in Christ. ***We are already dressed in His righteousness.*** We've been given credit for His perfection. So we must grow up into this righteous status, building ourselves up and growing together up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Who is helping you make progress now?

Who are you helping to make progress?

One year ago I got a ***pastoral leadership coach*** named Dean. He just retired after 35 years of pastoral ministry in the EFCA. We knew each other when I was serving in NC and reconnected two years ago at a conference in Orlando. I have had amazing supervisors and mentors. But now having an official coach with whom I check in every month, sharing my monthly report and plan, has really sharpened my ministry and focused my efforts to keep growing as your pastor.

We now require this system for all of our staff members - to have an outside coach with experience in their field and get monthly encouragement and guidance to keep growing and improving.

Coaches help us see past our blind spots, grow past our sticking points and reach new milestones. Dean has already helped us as a church in many ways. For one example, he gave me feedback on several sermons and helped me understand the importance of ***SLOWING down and varying my tone and emotional level.***

I KNOW that many of you had given me that same feedback but there is something about a coach who can help you actually see what other people have been saying and figure out how to make the needed change. This whole “talking to a camera” thing is helping me continue to stretch my emotional range and SLOW DOWN in my delivery. A little. I still get excited sometimes, ok?

Dean also encouraged me to shorten my messages some - and I’m working on that too, right?

Enough about me. How are YOU growing? How are YOU making progress? Who is YOUR coach? What is YOUR program? What is YOUR team like?

Let’s pray about our relationships and listen to the Lord and how He would have us grow in them this week.

Three Commitments in our Relationships

1. **Connect Compassionately bc you are loved**
2. **Forgive Freely bc you are forgiven**
3. **Pursue Progress bc you are righteous**

God has loved you infinitely in Christ - apply that same compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience in your relationships this week!

God has forgiven you completely in Christ - apply that same grace to quickly and freely pay the price for the sins and mistakes of others.

And God has declared you righteous in Christ - so live worthy of that calling. Grow up into your big brother’s clothes. Pursue progress, with a coach, a program and a team!

Let’s pray.