

November 2017

Listening to Understand

What do you want most out of life? Most of us would rank healthy relationships high on the list. Except for knowing Christ, healthy relationships make life enjoyable perhaps more than anything else. Even if your physical health isn't the best, if you have loving relationships, you can enjoy life. You can make a pile of money, but if your relationships are broken or shallow, your life will be empty. A poor man with a loving family and good friends is far richer than a rich man who is poor relationally.

A loving relationship with God is of first importance; but loving relationships with others is second. The Bible emphasizes pursuing healthy relationships as worthy of our best efforts. Even a cursory look around reveals that many folks suffer from hurting or broken relationships. Homes are shattered by divorce. Some who stay married are unhappy. Their homes are a tense battle-ground, not a loving refuge. Parents are at odds with their kids and the kids with their parents. On the church level, some bounce from church to church, leaving a trail of damaged relationships behind. Some Christians won't speak to other Christians because of misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and wrongs that have taken place. Sadly, the loving families, genuine friendships, and healthy relationships that we want most out of life often elude us.

"Shalom" is a Hebrew word often translated as "peace." Yet it means so much more than can be conveyed in a single-word definition. Its meaning is more dynamic. Shalom means having health, wholeness, balance, joy, and vitality in all of life's relationships...in our relationships with our Creator, ourselves, our family, our neighbors, the earth and our natural environment, etc.

God's Word gives the prescription for healthy relationships. If you consistently practice these qualities, you'll have healthier/shalom-infused relationships. Maybe you are thinking, "But healthy relationships also depend on others, don't they? It's virtually impossible to have a good relationship with some prickly people!" True. The apostle Paul acknowledged this:

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Romans 12:18

Sometimes, no matter what you do, some people are hard to get along with. But if you treat a difficult person with the qualities of grace, she/he will usually change for the better in how she/he relates to you. Even if some relationships never improve, it can change **your** attitude. Our role is to put aside all anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, and lying (Colossians 3:8-9). And, put on "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other" (Col. 3:12-13).

These kinds of relationships require learning to “listen in order to understand”, which is qualitatively different than what most of us have been taught our whole lives. Predominately, we have been taught to listen in order to form a reply or rebuttal for our own position or point of view. Essentially, this sets us up “against” or defines us “apart from” the other person, instead of connecting us through empathy and understanding.

God’s gracious, loving treatment of us is the basis for our treatment of others.

May we know and be expressions of shalom!

~ PASTOR TODD