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PORTLAND CENTRAL NAZARENE CHURCH

## **February 2018 : Better Together**

**Life is made up of relationships. We engage in relationships at work and at home. In fact, God created us to live that way. But, relationships are not always easy they take work. In February we are going to talk about building healthy and Godly relationships.**

"Life is relationships; the rest is just details" - Dr. Scott Sticksel

Life is made up of relationships. We engage in relationships at work and at home. In fact, God created us to live that way. But, relationships are not always easy they take work. Throughout February we are going to be talking about relationships and how we can choose to engage in our relationships better, the end result being more gratifying and meaningful relationships.

The Bible has a lot to say about relationships and even has some great tips on how to handle our relationships. This makes perfect sense since God is relational and created us to be the same. But, just like everything else in His creation, our relationships have been damaged by sin. We know, the only way to overcome sin is in Jesus Christ. So, as you go through this devotional and think about the relationships in your life it is essential that we surrender our relationships to the guidance and direction of Christ. When we do, they are in the best place for healing and redemption.

Let's find ways this month to encourage one another and live in more God honoring relationships with one another. After all, we are truly better together.

In Christ,  
Pastor Matt

\*\*Kylie Johnson contributed to this devotional. She recently started attending Multnomah Bible College and feels called into ministry.

## **Better Together In His Image**

*Genesis 1:26-27 - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Ever wonder what it means to have been created in the image of God? That is an impressive and humbling thought - to be created in God's image and filled with His breath. Being created in His likeness comes with some expectation and responsibility. A big part of that image is relationship. If you notice God refers to Himself in plurality. There are lots of explanations out there for that, but I am fond of the idea that God exists in relationship, we have come to describe that relationship as the Trinity. The trinity is this beautiful union in which God exists in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It is such an intimate relationship that you cannot have one without the other. They work together and depend on each other. It is the perfect relationship.

Since God is a relational God and we have been created in His image it only stands to reason that we are created to be in relationship with Him and with each other. Perhaps this is part of the reason God created Eve, to fully complete the image in which we have been created, a relational one. It is out of relationship that we have been created for relationship. We have a responsibility, because of who created us, to pursue healthy relationships; with God and with others. If we do not have healthy relationships we are not being very effective at bearing the image of our creator.

**Prayer:** God, help us to find ways to live in a healthy relationship with You and healthy relationships with those around us. Amen.

## **Better Together**

### **Created for Connection**

*Genesis 2:18-24 - Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

When God made humanity, He designed us to be in relationship. Adam was created, and was lonely. God knew this, so He brought to the man all of the animals. When Adam got to the end of all the animals, he was still lonely, because there wasn't someone for him to relate to on a more intimate level. God knew this, so He caused the man to fall asleep. Using part of the man, God created a helper for him. When Adam woke up, there was someone there that looked like him, interacted with him like he would, and spoke the same as he did. Adam called this someone Eve, meaning woman.

We are made to be in relationship; real, physical contact relationships. Social media is great, but it does not fulfill the deep need for human contact in relationship. How many times have you been messaging someone on Facebook and wishing that you could be with them in person? How often do we pull out our phones while we are in the same room as other people? God brought all the animals to Adam, and Adam couldn't find one that was his complement. Nothing substitutes for human interaction and relationship.

Find ways this week to connect with others on a personal level - take some time to get to know those around you. It just might change your life.

(Written By: Kylie Johnson)

## **Better Together Stronger Together**

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.*

Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't know what to do? Perhaps you were on the side of the road with a flat tire, or stuck at an event without knowing who would drive you home. Maybe you were out at a social event, and your friend walked away, now you're alone without anyone familiar around you. If you have ever experienced one of these scenarios, or something similar, chances are you really wished that you had a companion with you.

The writer of Ecclesiastes points out the benefit of having a friend or companion. If you are with someone, and one of you falls, the other can help them up. If you are walking and suddenly someone comes to attack you, two of you stand a better chance than just one. Then, the writer throws in an illustration. He talks about how a rope with three strands woven together isn't easy to break. This really drives home the point that being with someone, or two someones, is better than being alone. We are meant to live life relationally, with ourselves, with God, and with others. Without this relationship, we could fall into a hole without anyone to help us out. Who do you have in your life that would be the kind of companion the writer of Ecclesiastes describes? Are you this kind of companion to others?

God knew we would need each other, so He gave us each other. Who is there for you and who are you there for?

(Written By: Kylie Johnson)

## **Better Together A True Friend**

1 Samuel 18:1 - ... *the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.*

King David is described in Scripture as a man after God's own heart. He was a man who pursued God and trusted God in some pretty dark times. Before David became king he spent quite a bit of time alone, in caves, hiding from Saul. His faith in God was critical to his making it through this very difficult time in his life. But, a huge encourager and protector for David was Jonathan.

These two became great friends and had a great relationship. They looked out for each other, Jonathan risked his relationship with his father (King Saul) to tell David what Saul was planning, and they were there for each other. This is a great example of what we just saw in Ecclesiastes.

We will face difficult times in our lives. We have to trust God and put our faith in Him during those times. But, we cannot ignore the greatest tool He has given us - each other. If the man after God's own heart needed a friend, then so do we. The account of David and Jonathan is an example of true biblical friendship. True friendship, according to the Bible, involves loyalty, sacrifice, compromise, and yes, emotional attachment. Start today cultivating some Biblical friendships in your life.

## **Better Together**

### **The Most Important Relationship**

*John 17:20-26 - "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

We are made to be in relationship. We were made from a relationship. God desired to have someone to relate to, someone to have a friendship with, so He made us. Even within the Trinity, there is relationship. In Jesus' prayer to the Father, before He went to be crucified, He prayed for all believers who would come to faith after His time on earth was done. Jesus prayed, "I desire those You have given Me to be with Me where I am." He prayed for us to be one with Him like He and the Father are one.

How would you describe your relationship with the Father? Would you say that you are one with Him? What about other believers? Are you in unity with those around you? When we follow the example of Jesus' relationship with the Father, in our relationship with others and the Father, the world will know that Jesus was sent down to give us the ability to have the relationship with the Father that He desires. Are you living in that oneness? Are you spending time to get to know the Father?

(Written By: Kylie Johnson)



## **Better Together Fear Influences**

*Galatians 2:11-12 - But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.*

Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised and had developed some great relationships with that group of people. But, when Peter came to Antioch he started to build friendships with the Gentiles (the uncircumcised), that is until his other friends showed up. When they arrived, he withdrew from the Gentiles for fear of something, probably ridicule and criticism for hanging out with "those" people. That is unfortunate, because he could have built some really great relationships with some great people, but his fear played too big of a role in his relationships.

If we sit and really think about our relationships, particularly the ones that are not in that great of shape, we could probably track the problem to some fear we (or they) have. Do we fear helplessness, disconnection, control, failure, or inadequacy? When people get close to those areas of fear, when they push those buttons, how do we react? Do we get defensive, angry, or do we sneak away like Peter? Until we can identify our fears and deal with them, fear will have too much of an influence in our lives and especially in our relationships.

We must find ways to react in a Christ-like way when those buttons are pushed or else our relationships will continue to suffer.

**Prayer:** God, help us to see what we fear and guide us in our reactions to those fears. Amen.

## **Better Together Have a Different Spirit**

*2 Timothy 1:7 - For God has not given us a spirit of timidity (fear), but of power and love and discipline.*

Where does our fear come from? According to this verse it is not from God, He gave us a spirit totally opposite from fear, yet we still find fear hurting our relationships on a regular basis. Fear can be a terribly frustrating and paralyzing thing. Ultimately fear comes from the fall, comes with sin. We can see fear enter the world way back in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. After they ate from the tree they heard God in the garden and hid, then started blaming each other for their problem. Fear immediately took over and was causing them to run and to blame. Fear is not from God and therefore should not be allowed to have that much influence in our lives and in our relationships.

We should not participate in our relationships from a place of fear but instead we should participate from a place of power, love, and discipline. This is not an easy transition to make, reacting based on fear seems quite natural to most of us, so to react from a place of love is going to take effort. But, with God's help it is possible. Before you react to a situation in one of your relationships stop and ask yourself, is my reaction going to be based in a fear or is it based in the power, love and discipline that is from God?

## **Better Together God Is It**

*Psalm 27:1 - The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?*

*Isaiah 41:13 - "For I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'*

Have you ever said or thought something like, if only my spouse would change, if only I had a different boss, if my friends would just....the end of that statement is almost always something like, then I would be happy. When we think like that we are putting unfair expectations on other people. When you expect other people to fulfill your wants or take away your fear you will only get more disappointed and further damage those relationships. It is not up to your spouse, your boss, or your friends to take away your fear or meet all of your needs. It is unfair to expect them to.

God is the only One who has promised to be all that for us. He is the One who takes away our fears and who can meet our every need. It is only in Him we can find complete and total satisfaction. He is our light and our salvation, stop trying to make other people those things. They will fail every time because it is simply not their job, it is God's and He is good at what He does - trust Him.

**Prayer:** God, help us to look to you as the ultimate source of our peace and joy and not place that expectation on anyone else.

## **Better Together**

### **Perfect Love Casts Out Fear**

1 John 4:18 - *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...*

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

Love is the exact opposite of fear. Fear tells us to defend, to fight, to argue, and to protect. Love, however, tells us to do the opposite. Love does not need to be defended, it does not need to fight because it is not provoked, it does not hold grudges, and can even put up with someone else's imperfections. Love is what we need for healthy relationships, not fear. When we are filled with love we are less focused on fear. When we are less focused on fear it will most certainly have less influence in our relationships. The only place we can find the kind of love these passages are talking about is in Jesus.

If, today, you find yourself fearful, take time to ask God to fill you with His perfect love.

## **Better Together I am the Problem**

James 4:1 - *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*

We really like to blame someone else for our problems. We even like to make them the reason for our fears. But, as James so bluntly puts it, the real source of our problems is us, it is the things that are waging war in our hearts. Before we start pointing the finger at those around us for our relationship problems perhaps we should first take a look at ourselves and ask if there is some responsibility that we should take for the state our relationships are in.

When we get caught up in the blame game with others nothing ever gets resolved. About the only thing that gets accomplished in that game is more hurt and more anger. To have healthy relationships we have to stop the cycle and start taking responsibility for our behavior and the things we have said. But, again, to take responsibility means we will have to overcome our fears. Fear is what makes us want to be right and someone else to be wrong. Let's lose the fear, maybe even lose the fight, and win the relationship.

**Prayer:** God, change our heart and minds today to better reflect who You are.

## **Better Together Take Control of You**

Luke 10:38-42 - *Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

Mary was enjoying the company of Jesus while Martha was busy doing all kinds of other things, being a good host. I see Martha running around fuming about Mary, because Mary is not helping, she is just sitting there. Even Jesus says she is bothered about so many things. When Martha finally does talk, it is to complain about Mary. Martha was being consumed with something that was out of her control, her sister's actions. She could not make her clean or anything. It was taking away from the fact that Jesus was there!

We do this in our relationships all the time. We get consumed with something we cannot control - someone else. "Whenever you focus your attention on what the other person is doing, you take away your own power. You make yourself weak. In focusing on the other, you try to control things you can't control. For that reason it's an exercise in total futility, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness." (Gary Smalley, *DNA of Relationships*). Instead of worrying about the things we cannot control, let's start to focus on the things that we can control, like our own thoughts and behaviors.

## **Better Together Act Right**

Galatians 6:5 - *For each one will bear his own load.*

1 Corinthians 10:31 - *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

God is going to hold us accountable to our own actions, not the actions of someone else. Other people do not have power over us and we do not have power over them. The only person's behavior we are responsible for is our own and we get to choose what that behavior looks like. So, when someone pushes our fear buttons, like we talked about earlier, we get to choose how we respond to that. Perhaps we should take time to think about whether or not our response is going to be glorifying to God or not.

A great list of right behavior when it comes to relationships can be found in Colossians 3:12-13, "*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*"

When we read this list we should ask ourselves where am I succeeding and where am I falling short? It is about our personal success and failure, not about someone else's.

## **Better Together Think Right**

*Philippians 4:8 - Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

When it comes to our relationships we have to control the things only we can control. We cannot control what others say or what others do. One of the things we can control is what we think about. What we think about will play a very important role in our relationships. If all we do is think about the last time that person hurt our feelings or the negative aspects of the relationship then the relationship will never move forward. Instead of thinking about the negative all of the time, we should choose to think about the positive. In fact, everything negative that happens to us can be reframed into something positive (Romans 8:28).

Paul makes it clear in his letter to the Philippians that we get to choose what we dwell on (what we think about). He encourages them to think on good and positive things. We should take that same encouragement today.

What you think on is up to you not the people you are in relationships with. By controlling your thoughts you are also controlling your reactions and behaviors. Do as Paul says - choose today to think on good things.



## **Better Together Seek Forgiveness**

*Matthew 5:23-24 - "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."*

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount he speaks a lot about relationships. One of the things He mentions more than once is forgiveness; it is a big deal with Him. In this particular passage Jesus is talking about how it is not good to be angry or bitter. It poisons our hearts to the point of making us murderers without having to commit the act of murder. Having healthy relationships is so important to Jesus that He says don't even worship until you have been reconciled with your brother and in this case He basically says if you have wronged someone go and apologize before presenting that offering.

Our relationships are worth the humility it takes for us to admit our wrongs and apologize. Now, we cannot make that person accept our apology, but having extended that opportunity is our responsibility and is a choice we get to make. If you know you have wronged someone or someone has something against you, do not wait for them to come to you, go to them and seek reconciliation (if possible). Sometimes, the path to a better relationship starts with you taking the first step.

**Prayer:** God, show us today who we have wronged and the step we need to take to seek their forgiveness.

## **Better Together Grant Forgiveness**

Matthew 6:14-15 - *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*

Jesus continues with His strong words about forgiveness and His emphasis on having strong and healthy relationships. He goes so far as to say that if we are not willing to forgive, then God is not going to forgive us. We have to be willing to forgive others when they have offended or hurt us. Forgiveness is not always easy and there are plenty of reasons not to forgive someone. Many times we are waiting for them to do or say something in particular. But, we should offer forgiveness not based off of what they do, but instead based off of what God has done - He has forgiven you. If we forgive because God forgave, then it doesn't matter what they do or don't do.

Forgiveness does not mean you condone the offense or will allow it to happen again. Forgiveness is you saying, I will not dwell on this incident, bring it up to use against someone, tell others about it, or allow it to hinder our relationship moving forward. Forgiveness is a choice you are making to put the offense aside and work toward reconciliation. So, let's strive to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

**Prayer:** God, give us a heart of forgiveness.

## **Better Together Honor All People**

1 Peter 2:17 - *Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.*

Honor and respect can go a long way in this world. We often have the attitude that we only give honor and respect when we have received honor and respect. But, that is not the command we are given here or what the rest of Scripture teaches us. We are to honor people, that's it, no requirements on their part just an expectation on our end. This idea goes against what comes naturally to us. It is easier for us to honor ourselves and get angry when someone else does not honor us the way we think they should.

If we want to have healthy and growing relationships we start by honoring those around us. That is going to require some humility on our part. Paul puts it nicely in Philippians 2:3, "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.*"

We have to lower ourselves in order to raise others up. Jesus regarded our relationship with the Father as more important than Himself, which is why He went to the cross for us. We probably won't have to go to the cross in order to honor someone, but we may have to offer a few more smiles and a little more forgiveness.

**Prayer:** God, help us to honor all those around us, even those we do not know.

## **Better Together Value Others**

*John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

We often read this verse and celebrate what God has done for us in Jesus and we should do that. But, look at this verse a little bit differently for just a second. Think about the person you are most angry with or who has hurt you the deepest. Now, read this verse and put their name in it - God so loved \_\_\_\_\_. All the people in your life have great value to God, even you. We are worth the life of His only Son. We are all created in His image, we all have tremendous value, and we are His treasures.

It may be a little easier for us to honor all people when we can truly start to value all people. If we look at others as valuable parts of God's creation it might be a little harder to slander them or treat them harshly. When we see them as someone Jesus died for maybe we will work a little harder to get to know them. People are not just people; they are image bearers of our Creator who have been purchased with the shed blood of Jesus. They are priceless.

**Prayer:** God, help me to see others as you see them - as valuable members of Your creation.

## **Better Together**

### **Suspend Judgment**

*John 8:10-11 - Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."*

In this story a woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. She is brought before Jesus for Him to cast judgment and have her stoned. But, Jesus' responded quite differently than what the people were expecting. He put the decision back on them and asked whoever was without sin to throw the first stone. One by one they all walked away. Jesus did not condemn her either, but sent her away. He didn't condone her behavior, but He was willing to give her another chance. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. He sent her away because He saw value in her and wanted her to be saved, not condemned.

Healthy relationships require some suspended judgment and second chances. Often times we need to gather more information or simply get to know someone before we make a judgment. It takes a long time to really get to know someone; we need to take the time to get to know them before writing them off. People are not perfect; they are going to make mistakes. This lady made a mistake and Jesus gave her a second chance. Who in your life do you need to get to know better or give a second chance?

## **Better Together You are Worth it**

*Psalm 139:14-16 - I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.*

You are part of every relationship you will have in life and you are an important part of that relationship. A strong and healthy relationship starts with you. According to this Psalm 139 you are someone of great value and worth; you are someone of great importance. In our valuing other people we must not forget how much value we have too. God took great care in putting you together and getting to know you. He knows you better than you know yourself.

God cares deeply about you and all of your relationships. He does not want to see you or your relationships fail. We are all way too valuable to Him for Him to let us just fall apart. In those times when you are struggling or your relationships are struggling don't forget how much God cares and don't forget to ask Him for help.

**Prayer:** God, I know you care for us, even when we are struggling. Help us today in the areas we are the weakest.

## **Better Together**

### **The Greatest Commandment**

Mark 12:30-31 - *"and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

The greatest commandment is all about relationships. First Jesus mentions our relationship with God. He should be most important in our life and we should love Him with everything that we are, with all the energy that we have.

We should also be sure to love our neighbors. What is important is the qualifier in how we are to love our neighbors? We are to love them as we love ourselves. If we do not love ourselves very much we are not going to love our neighbors very much. Jesus is assuming that we want the best for ourselves and therefore we should want the best for those around us. When we love God as we should the overflow of that love goes into our life and the lives of the people around us.

This also means we cannot neglect ourselves in any of this. If we do not take care of ourselves and do what is best for us then we are not going to be able to love our neighbors as we should. If you burn out, then your relationships burn out. So, take time to feed and care for your spiritual life, your physical life, your mental, and your emotional life. When those areas are healthy and we are loving God as we should, it makes it easier for us to love others as we should. Love God and love others, just don't forget to love yourself.

