

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

How People Change – Part IV

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Colossians 3:1-17

January 24, 2016

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Colossians, Colossians Chapter 3. We are continuing our topical series we began the new year on, and plan to get back to our exposition of John before too many more weeks. We'll be resuming back in Chapter 19 of John. But today we are going to be in Colossians 3 because we are continuing the series we've been looking at which is 'Ask the Question', and the title of the message this morning is the same as it has been the last three Sundays, 'How People Change'. I am borrowing that title from a book that has been helpful to me by Paul Tripp and Tim Lane by that same title, How People Change.

We began the first Sunday after the new year in this series asking the question, *Why is it that we don't change?* Why is it that as those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and who are investing significant amounts of time, worship, Bible study, why is it that we don't change? Or we don't change very much? We've asked that question and we've considered, that one follow-up question from that that we always ought to examine is, one reason why people don't change is they are not truly saved, they haven't been born again. And so there is no new spiritual life, even though there may be an outward profession, there is not inward reality, and so the Scripture exhorts us at times to examine ourselves to see if we truly are partakers of spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

But Scripture also makes clear that it is a problem for genuine believers, that we can experience much less change than we ought because we are not following God's blueprint, God's design of how to change. We are neglecting His means because God is a God who works through means. Though He sovereignly rules over everything, and every molecule, as we said earlier, He works through means, and if we are neglecting His means, then we are not going to change.

We began looking at this under the subject of Romans 12, and we spent those last three weeks on Romans 12, and we said that if we are going to change we need to understand who we are. We saw in Romans 12:1 that we are priests, we are those who are to offer sacrifices, and sacrifice ourselves as an aspect of worship, continually reorienting our lives to worship God truly. So who and what we are called to do, we saw that, and how we are called to do it, by the transformation of

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our minds. We are to change from the inside out, from the heart level, that we stop worshipping idols, and we turn and worship the living and true God, and that that happens by the renewing of our minds. That is where real transformation comes from.

And last week we began asking another question, as Paul transitioned into Romans 12:3 and following, where does that kind of change happen? It is not just the who, what, how, of change, but where? We said that true change happens in the church, among the people of God. That God has willed, God has ordained that His people become more like His Son in community. This is the way that He wants to do it. And to the degree that we neglect that, we hinder our own sanctification, we put obstacles in the way. So we can see, now the church, when I said ‘The Church’, I don’t mean the building, I don’t mean the programs, or just the organization of the church. No, the Church in the Bible is an assembly of called-out followers of Jesus Christ, it is a community. The Church is the people who love Jesus in a local setting in which we attach ourselves, and work together to glorify God, and to grow in Christ’s likeness. And if we are neglecting that, we will not change as we ought.

God intends to use a phrase that Tripp and Lane use in their book. I mentioned they have a chapter where they just talk about, the title of the chapter is ‘Change is a Community Project’, Chapter 5. One of the phrases they use in that chapter is the idea of ‘Redemptive Relationships’. That we need relationships, and God has made us for relationships, and we need to be somewhat intentional in the way we go about relationships, so that our relationships are redemptive. That is, that they are redeeming us from former ways of living, and continuing to apply the Gospel, and transform us. That happens in relationships, redemptive relationships. What I want to suggest to you is that this is an area where I think, I know myself, I come way short of understanding this, and applying this in my own life. And as I look at this, I think, “I’ve neglected so much of this.” It is easy to be in the church, even to be a pastor, to meet, and yet not be as intentional about relationships as I need to be, to help myself grow, and to help others grow. And as we look more and more at the New Testament, we see this corporate nature of relationships.

I want to read to you, we’re going to focus in on Colossians 3:16, that is the verse we are going to look at, but I want to read it in context. So I’m going to read Verses 1-17, and as I do, I want to remind you that every time you see the word ‘you’, that it is really ‘you’ plural, ‘ya’ll’. We just can’t get away from our southern superiority in this area, our language superiority, right? We specify that,

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but anyway, it is all 'you' plural. There are 19 verbs we are going to read, and all of them are, well 15 verbs, they are all second person plurals. There are four participles which are all plural, implying that he is talking to the group the whole time. There is a total of 19 pronouns and adjectives, and they are all plural pronouns, and plural adjectives. There is no singularity in this passage. So as we read it, listen to it that way.

Colossians 3:1-17 ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

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Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might truly teach us from Your word, that the Spirit might have His way in our hearts, and that Christ might be exalted. We pray in His name, and for His glory, Amen.

Why are redemptive relationships an essential part of our sanctification and Christian growth? Why is that? It is because God wills it to be that way, and it is actually, though it is difficult, and in some ways it feels more difficult, it is the perfect way to sanctify us. We need to be in relationship. And the fact that we don't invest in relationships, because the irony is as people who are created in the image of God, and think about this, God is a relating God. He is a God who has existed from all eternity in relationship. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one God, have always existed in a communion of love. And when He made man in His image, and likeness, he made us to relate to Him, and to relate to one another, in a way that nothing else in all creation relates. We have the capacity to know the living God, and to share intimacy with one another in His presence, to glorify Him together. So He has willed that we live in relationship.

Now when we fell, in the fall, the relationship between man and God was severed. The first thing that man did was to hide from God, he covered himself. There was a fracture spiritually between man and God, vertically, and there was a fracture horizontally because the man and women then were in discord and disharmony. Remember what Adam said when God came to him and said, "Who told you you were naked? What's the problem? What happened?" "It's that woman." No, "Hey, we had a problem. Honey, come here, we need to talk to the Lord about this." No, "It's that woman." That is what happens with sin, sin divides us, and it fractures us, and yet we were created for perfect relationships, like Adam and Eve had before the fall. There was that sense of amazing intimacy where the Scripture is giving us some kind of understanding of that. When it says they were naked and were not ashamed, they had freedom to be completely open and transparent, and no fear. That is what we are made for, we are wired for that.

So we are born into the world sinners, but we are born into the world with this longing for relationship, and yet now, we, because we live for ourselves, and we're not connected to God, we trample on relationships, even though we need relationships. We have a love/hate relationship with relationships. That's something I borrowed again from Tripp, a love/hate relationship with relationships.

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I like that, it describes it well. We need them and yet we hate them. We need relationships, but people just won't relate to us the way we want them to. If they would, everything would be fine. See, we want to be our own God, don't we? And other people won't bow down to us in that way.

But the Lord has willed to change us. He redeems the heart, He restores fellowship between us and God. That is what happens at salvation, someone comes to understand the horror of what's going on. The world is a mess, but really biggest mess in my life is inside, it's in me. I've rebelled against God, I've sinned against a holy God, I've trampled on His love and on His glory. There is no hope for me. I stand under His wrath. There is no hope for me in myself, but then I hear the Gospel, that Jesus Christ has come, and He has made a way for me to be reconciled to God. That He has taken the holy wrath of His holy Father in Himself, on the cross, bearing our sins in His body on the tree. That He has taken it out of the way, He has made peace between God and man, and those who believe in Christ are now at peace with God."

We have a right relationship with God, and then suddenly, everyone who is at peace with God is also brought into right relationship, in our hearts, with one another. But the problem is we still have sin natures, and so though we love God, we have this part of us that still resists Him. So we recognize the tension of maintaining our walk with Him. It is hard, it is difficult. In the same way it is hard and difficult to maintain the horizontal peace and unity that He has put into our hearts. It is now there, that is why Ephesians 4:3 says, "Be diligent to preserve, *to preserve*, the unity of the Spirit." It doesn't say to *create* the unity of the Spirit, it says preserve it. It is already there but you've got to work at preserving it. Relationships are hard.

Now God has willed that He wants to make you and me more like Jesus every day, and one of His main tools is other people, other Christians, redemptive relationships. Now I said if we don't cooperate with the Lord, and His means, we won't experience blessings in our lives as Christians. I mean, everything is all of grace, and yet there is our responsibility to exercise repentance, and faith, and to trust in His means. If you don't read your Bible, you are not going to grow in your understanding of who He is. If you don't spend time in prayer and communion with God, you are not going to grow in your intimacy with the Lord. And if you don't spend time in relationships with people, you are going to seriously hinder your sanctification. And I would suggest that that is precisely the problem with

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many of us in this room, if not all. Even those who are doing well could do better, and many of us are not doing well at all in this area, relationships.

You know I used the analogy a few weeks back that what is going on in the Christian life could be likened to a renovation project. You know, 'This Old House', and so you've got to tear some stuff out on a daily basis, and you've got to do some repair. And when someone does that kind of renovation, it is amazing how many of those are on TV now, shows like that, people sitting and watching someone do that. I enjoy that myself, it is something amazing to see something go from old, and rundown, and broken, to something beautiful, and new, and restored. Well that is what God wants to do in our hearts.

Now imagine you need to have some work done on your house, you've got some problems in your house, your literal house, and so you call someone who is a contractor who can fix things like that, and they come to your house. Maybe you've had a leak, this has happened to me before, you have a leak in a house, and the leak creates more problems. It is not like it was just a leaky pipe that needs to be fixed, now there is drywall in your ceiling that is messed up, and there may be some boards that run across the floor that are messed up, mold or whatever. So you call the contractor, and there is a big project, he's got to come in and cut stuff out. He's got to cut out the bad wood, fix the pipe, first thing, then take the bad wood out, take the drywall out, and thankfully, we are blessed to have Peter Underwood in the church, he has done this for me.

Now when he came, I didn't say, "Hey, Peter, I'm glad you are here," because when you have a situation like that, it is kind of an emergency. There is water leaking, I don't know how to get to it, we've got to get it stopped. "I'm glad you're here, thanks for coming, but listen, I know you brought that big trailer of tools, but I want you just to do this project with a hammer, and a screwdriver. That is all I want you to use. I want you to fix everything, but I want you just to do it with those two tools." Now that is ridiculous. It would be like you taking your car to a mechanic and saying, "I want you to not use any of your tools, just do what you can. I want to stand back and watch." It might be fun to watch that, you know, see what he can do with two or three tools. But it is not an efficient way to really fix the problem.

In fact, one of the things that I love watching about people like Peter, or watching a mechanic, or watching someone, many of you guys have great skill with tools, is when you have a project, you have a need, something happens, and you have

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exactly the right tool for that issue. Isn't that amazing what a joy that is? I mean like you have the screwdriver that fits perfectly, because if you don't have the right screwdriver you can strip the screw. Have you ever done that? Now you have a lot bigger problem than you had before. If you have the right tool it makes all the difference. Now I would suggest to you that God's toolbox includes every other believer in your life, and in this church, and that if you are not engaging in relationships, you are basically asking the Lord, "Change me, but just don't use any of those other tools. I'm not comfortable with those. I like the hammer and the screwdriver. Leave all those others at home." That would be ridiculous, and so it is ridiculous for us to do that.

Now you see this, and what I want us to consider in our time today, three points, there are three main points, and the first is *The Necessity of Redemptive Relationships*.

1) The Necessity of Redemptive Relationships:

If we are going to change, we need to be in relationship. I mentioned before I read that there are basically 19 verbs and participles in the passage, and they are all plural. So when it says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you," the verb for 'let it dwell', and 'within you', is all plural. "Let you all let the word of Christ dwell within you (plural) richly." And it becomes obvious, even in English, when you read on, "...with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing, how does the word dwell within you (plural), it is by your teaching and admonishing one another." The idea is, if the word of Christ is going to transform us, there has to be this sharing in the word. We all need to be taught and admonished. The word 'admonished' here is the verb 'neutheteo', that word 'neuthetic' counseling comes from this word. It means 'to place in the mind', or 'to put in the mind', or 'to put in one's right mind'. The idea is that you are placing in the mind, you are correcting something that is wrong. So 'admonish', or 'reprove'. We all need to be taught. We all need to be admonished.

That is the clear implication and you see this over, and over, and over again. If we could go passage, after passage, after passage, we would see this. The idea is that we can't, on our own, with our Bible, I mean, the private devotional life of the Christian is critical, it is foundational. It is one of the biggest tools that we need to have in our lives. We need to be in the word, on a regular basis, on our own, and we need to be praying, spending time, significant amounts of time in prayer before the Lord. Yes, absolutely. We need to have time with our families, spiritual times

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with our families. Yes. But we also, when you look at the New Testament, we need to be committed to really having relationships where, you know a redemptive relationship is where you are speaking the truth in love to one another. You are able to admonish and you are able to be admonished, and we have to cultivate that, we have to work at that. It is hard to admonish others.

Now some of us find that easier than others do, but either way, if you find it too easy, or if you find it too hard, it is because of sin in your heart. It is too easy because you just really like telling people what to do, and that is your disposition, and your sin nature. Or, it is hard because, and this is really where I come from more, part of it is culture, I mentioned earlier we have the thing about ‘*ya’ll*’ right? But we’ve got a lot wrong with our culture of course. And one of the things we have wrong is that we are too nice. There are just things you just don’t say. Well, that is not healthy. We have to learn to be more direct, and we can do that sinfully. So a redemptive relationship is one in which there is the ability to teach one another, and admonish one another. We are willing to admonish and to be admonished. We are willing to teach and to be taught. There needs to be an intentional effort on our parts to involve ourselves in relationships like that. Sometimes that is going to look like, “Let’s get together and pray, and meet together on a weekly basis, and hold one another accountable.” Or maybe that looks like a small group relationship with five or six families who get together and pray for one another. Those are things we ought to be considering in our lives.

But there is also a sense in which it is not just sort of the intentional gathering, whether it is one-on-one, or ten or twelve people, but just the incidental walk of life. We need to be more intentional when we are just talking to one another, more sensitive. Asking the Lord, “Lord, I know here we are talking about the weather, we are talking about the Braves, or the Bulldogs, or whatever,” and that is okay, but at a point. “Help me to be sensitive to how I could be a blessing to this brother, or this sister.” If we are asking that, then we are being intentional, even as we go through kind of the incidental daily life. I mean, we look for opportunities to ask questions like, “Hey, you seem to be down a little bit. What is going on? I’d be happy for you to share that with me. How can I pray for you?” Or we see a problem, and we learn to say, “You know, I’m not sure I’m seeing this carefully, but I have a question about this.” You know, the way you responded to that, and there is a way, and an art to learning how to do that, but it is going to be messy. Some of us are going to be better at sort of softly doing it, and others are going to be better at just kind of pounding. And the reality is God’s going to use all of us upon each other, and He’s going to use the people that pound and the people that

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are soft on us, because He uses all of His tools in His toolbox, and the question is are we willing to let Him do that?

There are certain things that we just won't see unless somebody tells us. It's amazing how this is the case. You see it in your marriage. When you get married, that's one of the great tools of God in sanctification, isn't it? You don't realize that when you're in love getting ready to get married. I think people that are more well-taught than I was when I was young and Patty and I were getting married, I wasn't thinking about, "This is going to be great. God is really going to use this for my sanctification." If I'd been thinking correctly I would have thought that way, because it's been His number one tool in my life. She sees things and she calls things out on me in a way that nobody else sees. She knows me better than anybody else. And I see things in her life, and then the problems that I have even in my life are a blessing to her, because the irritants, the irritation factor is something that exposes our own heart problems, doesn't it? Someone else irritates you, angers you, and it's like red light on the dashboard going of saying hey, there's an issue not so much there. There may be an issue over here. I'm not saying there's not, but there's an issue here that I've got to deal with. Why does it bother me so much that this person just keeps on talking and doesn't let me talk when I'd like to share something? Why does that bother me so much?

So there are some things we'll never see unless we're in relationship. This is why it's so interesting that the second great Commandment that Jesus gave, remember when He was asked, "What is the greatest Commandment?" They were trying to trap Him, and Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind," and then He added the second one. They didn't ask about the second. He just told them, "The second is likened to it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He picks two Commandments, one from Deuteronomy 6:5 and one from Leviticus 19:18, and I think He just kind of blew them away with that. What's really interesting, though, is the context of Leviticus 19:18. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Right before that in Verse 17 it says, listen to this. "You shall not hate your neighbor." You see he's saying the same thing negatively, right? He says, "You shall not hate your neighbor," and in the next verse he says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But back to Verse 17. "You shall not hate your neighbor; you shall surely reprove him. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's the context. What is that saying? Love reproves. Love is willing to admonish, and isn't that really obvious when you think about it? We don't like to be told we're wrong, but

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if we have any sense, if we're in our right minds, a wise man loves rebuke, Proverbs tells us.

I love the illustration that C. J. Mahaney shared in his book on humility about the guy that's at the restaurant with his family, and he sees a man sitting at the next table, and the guy is obviously preparing for a big meeting. He said he's dressed to a T. His suit looks fantastic. Every hair is in place, and he's got some notes in front of him, and you can tell the way he's talking, even as he's sitting there, the guy is almost doing like I'm doing right now at the breakfast table. He's rehearsing what he's about to say. He's got some kind of big meeting, some big presentation, something huge is about to happen, and this guy is getting up from the table to leave. Every hair is in place, the suit is perfect, the power tie, and his well-groomed mustache has a dollop of cream cheese on it. The guy sitting there says, "Should I tell him?" "Of course." But that is hard, isn't it? "Excuse me, sir. I know you don't know me. I've got good news and bad news. You really look sharp, everywhere except right here. That's the bad news." No, but of course love would do that, wouldn't it? Can you imagine walking into the meeting? "I'm here to talk to you about buy this used property." I'm ready. I've got everything prepared, and here's this cream cheese. Isn't it funny how that's the only thing you can see? You can't think about anything else except the fact that somebody's got something on their face. It's like it's shouting at you, "Cream cheese! Cream cheese! Cream cheese!" I can't hear anything you're saying. So the loving thing is to say that.

Now, we can't see what's on our face, and the Lord wills that so that we will need other people to tell us. We need people that will admonish us. You see in me maybe a tone of voice that's just not right. I don't hear it. I'm so used to living with it that I've gotten immune to it. I need you to tell me. You see a pattern that I'm not seeing. It's the same thing. We need redemptive relationships, the necessity of redemptive relationships. An interesting verse in Proverbs 20:5, says:

Proverbs 20:5 ~ The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

One of the things that's going on there is he says, "Look, the reason we do what we do, the things that drive us, are like deep waters. It's like looking down into the water. You can see a little ways into the water, but with deep water you cannot see the bottom. But a man of understanding in your life can help you draw out the purposes so that your heart can be transformed from the deepness level. You need help. I need help. So that necessity of redemptive relationships, that's the first

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thing. The second thing that we see in this passage is the difficulty of redemptive relationships.

2) The Difficulty of Redemptive Relationships:

Not just the necessity, but now the difficulty of redemptive relationships. And under this second main point, *The Difficulty of Redemptive Relationships*, there are three sub-points. I think we see in the passage three things that we can draw out. One is that redemptive relationships are always hard. Relationships are always hard, but especially if you're going to be intentional about helping one another to be more like Christ, it's going to be hard. It's always going to be hard. I think you see this implied in the fact—this passage of Colossians 3:1-17, and particularly Colossians 3:5-17, is talking about sanctification. In Verse 5, you're putting off immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed. In Verse 8, you're putting off anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, and you're putting on (Verse 12) a holy, loving, compassionate, humble, gentle, holy life. You're becoming more like Christ. And so that's the goal, but you can see clearly implied in the context is it's going to be hard. Verse 13, how is this going to happen? You're going to have to bear with one another. You're going to have to forgive each other whenever you have a complaint against anyone. The idea is if you are in relationship with other people, you're going to have to bear with one another, and you're going to have to forgive one another. It's going to happen. You're going to sin against each other.

You put two sinners together, they're saved by grace and God's working in their lives, they still have a sin nature, and there's going to be friction. There's going to be heat. And are you willing then to work at it? And the way that you work at it is to continue to rely upon grace, and to shower love, and to let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. He's basically saying, "Look, you're going to have to labor at love." Verse 14: ***Beyond all these things put on love...*** You're going to have to labor at peace. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. You're going to have to work hard at this. It's always hard. The difficulty of redemptive relationships, the first sub-point is they're always hard.

Secondly, they're often messy. They're not just always hard, but they're often messy. You put people together who are redeemed, but yet they still have the old man. The old nature is not gone finally until Jesus comes back or until we die. And look at what our old nature is like. Verse 5:

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Colossians 3:5 ~ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Colossians 3:8 ~ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

These are things we used to walk in, he said, but now you're to put them aside. But you don't always put them aside well. So when you're around people, what are you going to experience? You're going to experience some of these things, because each of us is growing. We're going to see other people's ugliness. It's amazing how good people look from a distance, relatively speaking, to when you get up close. We all look better from a distance. Your best friend is your best friend until you live with him, like a roommate in college. Suddenly it's just not such a great relationship. Familiarity breeds contempt. So it's often messy. And one of the things I think that really discourages us as Christians is we know we're supposed to be getting holier and more righteous, and so we invest in relationships, and what happens? The more you get around people and the more you fellowship with them, and you serve like we talked about last week, using your spiritual gifts together (from Romans 12), the more that you do that, the more you're going to get irritated, and the more you're going to get angry, and the more you're going to get anxious, and the more you're going to get frustrated, and all of these things. And you say, "This isn't working! I'm getting worse, not better. I think the solution is to get some distance."

Well, the reality is God's doing it exactly His way. By putting us around one another, He starts exposing what's already in the heart. When anger comes out, when frustration, when worry, when envy, or greed, when all of these things come out, Jesus makes really clear in Mark 7 that whatever comes out of your mouth, whatever comes out in your life is what's already in your heart. Now, when people are around me and they help that come out, if I'm thinking biblically, I should be grateful. I should be discouraged about what's in my heart, but I should be grateful that I found it, because if I didn't find it, it would still be there. But I have an opportunity to deal with it now. This problem that has been hidden inside of me has come out.

This is what James is talking about in James 4:1-3. Where do conflicts come from? They come from the lusts and passions of your heart that war within you. So you covet and don't have, and you murder. You get angry. You yell at someone

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because of the evil desires in your heart. If everything went great in my life every day, I wouldn't see all that ugly anger. I mean, think about the perfect day, how you would describe the perfect day. You just lay it out. You walk from one thing to another, and it's like, "Here I am. I'm glad to be here. Blessings, brother and sister. It's so good to see you." We're all loving the Lord together, all growing, and everything happening according to plan just like I intended it to. First of all, that never happens, right? And it's good that it doesn't, because it wouldn't change us. But the fact that people are always getting in the way of our plans, that is by design, because you and I are not God. God alone is God, and His plan is all that matters. And when people get in the way of my plans, what that reminds me is, "Oh yes, I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. I don't have the right to have an agenda for this day. My agenda ought to be to do His will, and His will is for me to submit to Him. And Lord, I'm thankful that You've allowed me to have this little situation right here to remind me of that." If we didn't have that, we would never get anywhere in the Christian life. This is why it's so important for us. I said earlier that marriage is such a great blessing in sanctification, and the Lord calls some to singleness, and that's perfectly His prerogative. And you may be single, and that's fine and great, but if that's the case, you have freedom to be involved in relationships in a different way, and you need to go after it. Don't be loving being alone all the time, otherwise you won't grow to be like Jesus. It would be like asking the contractor not to use all his tools. So that's the difficulty of relationships. They're always hard and they're often messy. There are three sub-points under that second main point of *The Difficulty of Relationships*. They're always hard, they're often messy, and they're apparently ineffective.

Often as we just spend time with people, it seems like we're not always getting the bang for the buck. We're spending so much time, and I don't feel like anything really is happening. And like I said, sometimes we just seem like we're getting worse, and we don't seem like we're getting better, and we keep trying at this, we keep working at this, and nothing's happening. What are you to do? You're to keep on keeping on, because God said this is the way that He does it.

It would be like if a contractor is at your house and he's fixing your roof, and that means he's also got to fix your crown molding, and so he goes outside and he gets some wood. This is what happened for me when Peter is working. There's places where he had to go out and he had to measure a piece of wood and cut it. He had to go get some wood from Home Depot. He had to come back and cut it, and then he had to use the band saw or whatever. I don't even know what the tools are. He had to use the miter saw. I know that. You cut the edges on the corner. Isn't that right?

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A miter saw? Okay, so now if he's doing all that, think about this, and I walk outside and I say, "Hey, nothing's happening in here. It's still messed up in there. What are you doing? We're not making any progress in the house right now for the last two hours, when you drove to Home Depot and you've been cutting and doing all this stuff. You're fired. Let's stop this. This is not working out." That is how stupid it is for us to stop working at relationships because nothing's happening. God is doing His work, and He will do His work in His time. Maybe an even better image is like a seed growing under the soil. So much is happening under the soil before you ever see anything grow out. And if you don't keep watering and keep tending that, you will not experience the harvest. So it is with relationships. The difficulty in relationships is they're always hard, often messy, and apparently ineffective. Thirdly, not just the necessity of relationships, or the difficulty of relationships, but the glory of relationships.

3) The Glory of Relationships:

When you are in relationship with others, then you can experience (Verse 15) the peace of Christ ruling in your hearts. When do you need the peace of Christ? When you're in conflict, and you won't experience it until you need it. When will you be able to put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity? When you need it. Agape love only comes and flows in the context of real need. "I cannot love this person as I ought to, Lord. You've got to love them through me. And I choose to express Your love to them even though I'm not feeling it yet, because of Jesus Christ, and because You've loved me." That prayerful attitude, that dependence that happens in the moment, in the need, is what transforms us and unleashes the love of God into our lives in the same way the peace of God does. What he describes in Verse 16, the word of Christ dwelling within you richly, the word of Christ is taking up residence in and among you. What a glorious picture that is. Jesus' word is speaking and being spoken. His glory is being made known as we are teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in our heart to God.

The glory of redemptive relationships is that we work through things and we work together. What we're basically doing is we're learning how to work on our sanctification together. It's like a project that we're doing together. We get together. Sometimes you get together to do things, right? We get together to build something or we get together to work on something together, to write something together, to make something. Christians are getting together, and when we get together in intentional ways like I said earlier, small group meetings or one-on-one

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discipleship, or we get together in more incidental ways, talking after church or talking after Bible study, if we start seeing it, “Lord, help me see this,” that we’re actually now working together, and when I’m talking to this brother, I’m working on my sanctification and his, and I’m saying, “Let’s work on this together.” It’s a heart attitude that says, “God, do something in us. I’m here to serve. I’m on Your agenda.” So he says something that’s a little bit irritating to me, and it’s an opportunity for me to remember, “Why does that bother me so much? Lord, look at my heart. Why am I angry about this?” And I repent at a heart level, or we talk about it and we work through it, and we each become a little more like Jesus. What that does is, and this is the beauty of it, God wants us to do everything and work everything together. Everything that you can do with someone else is better than doing it on your own. I say that because that’s how the Trinity is. God the Father never does anything without God the Son. God the Son never does anything without God the Spirit. When they created the world, they created the world together.

The Father is the one who plans creation. The Son is the one who accomplishes creation. The Spirit is the one who is actuating and activating creation. You see the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:3. You see the Father God created the heavens and the earth. He’s the one who’s determining the order of creation. And how does it happen? It happens through His mighty Word. As He speaks, God said, “Let there be light.” That’s the Son of God, the spoken Word of God through whom, as John says when he says, remember, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through Him all things were created, through the Word.” So in creation, they worked together, and everything that they do, they work together.

In redemption they work together. The Father plans redemption. The Son accomplishes redemption. The Holy Spirit applies it. God loves to do everything that He does, in community, and He wants His people to learn to do that too. And when we can learn to see that that’s the goal, that really is the way that He wants to do things, and we commit to that, and we realize it’s going to be hard, but for the glory of God we choose to do it, then the true glory of it comes when we work through a problem. Say for instance, there’s a breach in a relationship, a difficulty, and there’s real pain. And when you choose to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit, you go after the relationship, and you try to understand the other person, their hurt. You try to share where you are and where you’re coming from, but it’s all about God and His glory, and making me more like Jesus. You’re humbling

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yourself, and you're coming like he says, with humility and gentleness. You're trying, "God, help me. God, help me."

The world looks at this and they say, "It'll never be the same." Haven't you heard people say that, or you've even thought that? "This relationship will never be the same after what they did and what they said." That may be true, but biblically if the Gospel is true, and the Gospel is, a relationship between two believers may never be the same, but it will be better. It will be better than it ever was, because God's love and God's peace can rule. And what happens then is when that happens, something deep, sanctification at the deepest level is happening that kind of conflict, we get out the other side of it and we're like Joseph. Strictly speaking, it's never 100% anyone's fault, right? We can get on the other side of it and say, "Whatever you sinned, you may have meant for evil." Remember what Joseph said to his brothers? "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." What you did may have been sinful, and what I did was sinful to you, but look how God has used you in my life. We see that that person that we may have lamented that we even had a relationship with them for some period of time, we may have struggled with so much, and now we see they were the exact tool to perform the exact function at the exact time that we needed it. That is the glory of our God. He knows what He's doing. He does all things well, and He will do that in the hearts of people who are willing to surrender to Him and trust Him.

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we thank You, Lord, that Your plan to make us like Jesus is so multifaceted and so wonderful, and that You are committed to it, that You who began a good work in us will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. Father, help us to examine our hearts and to see how each of us needs to examine the ways that we pull back from relationships, the sinful attitudes, the unbelief. Transform us, even our thinking about relationships, so that we can get more intentional and committed to loving one another and building one another up, all for the glory of Jesus Christ. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

"How People Change – Part IV"

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