

Good morning **class**. ... Dr. David Jeremiah sometimes addresses his congregation as “class...” and his sermons *really* **teach**! I have learned so much from him.

But there is a different reason why I begin today’s sermon... by referring to you as “class.” ... I am going to take you inside my interpersonal communication class that I teach at the community college in Bend. ... (As a matter of fact)... I am going to teach a part of the lesson that I gave in my lecture this past Thursday morning. ... I want to use it as the backdrop to the passage we are about to study in Luke... which we are going through here on Sunday mornings.

The course that I teach at the college is all about relationships. There are many concepts in textbooks and they (regularly) get taught by many professors... that I won’t teach... And some I do teach – but try to plant enough doubt in the minds of my students... in order to get them to search further.

Today I am going to present one of those concepts that I do teach. ... But (before I teach it in my college courses) I confess to my students that it makes me very uneasy. Then after I teach the concept... I ask if it makes anyone else feel uneasy... and several often reply that it does. My hope is to make them thirst for (what you and I know is a much better way.)... I want them to suspect that the secular world’s academic thinking about human relationships – may not be the best practice (or methods)... for building and maintaining good relationships. ... It often is... and it often isn’t. This one... I see as having (and I think you will too will see as having) its short-comings.

But... remember... what I am about to give you from my lecture... I am using (today) as a DARK backdrop... against the light that I will THEN give you from God's Word. So "CLASS"... let's get started.

Nearly all of the textbooks that I have read have a difficult time defining the word "relationship." They all discuss it as a concept... but most (at least the honest ones) admit their difficulty in coming up with an adequate definition for it. Today we are going to satisfy our need for a definition by simply acknowledging what must be present... in order for humans to have any sort of relationship.

There are three elements that must be present... in order for us to conclude that a relationship exists. 1. There must be ATTRACTION. 2. There must be INTIMACY (And) 3. There must be... (You know what?)... I am not going to mention the third... until we come to it. This third one makes me very uncomfortable.

Let's look for just a moment at the first element that must be present in any relationship – ATTRACTION. If there is no attraction there cannot be a relationship. But what attracts us? What makes us (even) want a relationship with someone? ... I will give you six things that attract us to someone. (The first two are closely connected... so I'll mention them together.

We are attracted to others who are similar to us. Even before we initially speak to someone... we size them up in ways to see if they are "our own kind." The saying "birds of a feather will flock together" – is true. We are attracted to those who appear to be like us in some (or numerous) ways. New relationships usually begin with small talk. Do you know why? We

are trying to figure out if we have similarities. ... “*How long have you lived in Central Oregon?*” ... “*Do you like to hunt and fish?*” ... “*Oh! You like to jog! How far do you run every day?*”

Now this doesn't mean attraction will *only* happen if everything matches perfectly. Similarity doesn't have to exist on everything. Only matters that are seen as very important. One of you might be a Taylor Swift fan... while the other doesn't care at all about her... but does like the Kansas City Chiefs Football team. Those two likes might be complimentary. Taylor Swift happens to be dating the star receiver named Kelcy... and she goes to all of their games.

Complementarity is a second reason two people are attracted. Do the perceived differences compliment each other? If so... attraction often happens. One may like to stay home and cook and clean... while the other enjoys working in the business world...

(Next)... Reciprocal attraction means that we tend to be attracted to those who are attracted to us. If you sense someone “likes” you... it affirms your belief that you are a likeable person. In turn... you “like” them.

Competence is another reason we are attracted to others. We like to be around competent people. It makes us look good to be around them (as if something might rub off on us...)

Disclosure also attracts us to another person. When someone shows enough confidence in us to reveal something personal about themselves... we feel affirmed by them... and attraction can occur.

(And) sixth is proximity. You may not be particularly fond (at first) of a person that you work with. But being around them for an extended period of time... some sense of liking (or attraction) often occurs.

ATTRACTION must be present for there to be a relationship. The second element is INTIMACY. Understanding this one is “a sense of closeness.” We feel close to others as we spend time gaining shared experiences. In graduate school I had to take several Koine Greek classes. It was often said... and I found it to be true... that the best friends you will have in seminary... will be those who took the first Greek class with you. We shared so much hardship together. Intimacy was born.

ATTRACTION... and INTIMACY are two element which must be present... in order for a relationship to exist. How are you doing...? Are you ready for the third element (the one that makes me nervous)...? The third necessary ingredient is REWARDS. We have to feel that we are getting some kind of pay-off from the relationship. No pay-off... (nothing in it for me)...? No relationship on my end.

Now I would like to present to you what is known as – The Social Exchange Theory. The social exchange theory says this:

We seek out people who can give us rewards – either tangible or emotional – that are greater than or equal to the costs we encounter in dealing with them. (Let that soak in a little.) ... **[P A U S E]** ... We seek out people who can give us rewards – either tangible or emotional – that are greater than or equal to the costs we encounter in dealing with them.

According to the social exchange theory... we look at all of our relationships (and potential relationships) according to a mathematical

formula. We do this subconsciously – most of the time. We look at the rewards that we can receive... and subtract the costs (of the relationship... the things that we have to put-up with... in order to keep the relationship)... and this determines the outcome (or satisfaction) that we have in it.

Rewards – Cost = Outcome of Relationship.

In order to understand the social exchange theory... there are a few more things that I need to explain. The mathematical equations continue.

Please bear with me... just a little longer.

The graphic that I have put on the screen before you shows a woman who is evaluating her relationship with her boyfriend (or husband.) ... She thinks to herself: ...*“He loves me, but He certainly is not ‘Mr. Right.’ He has a ‘hair- trigger temper’ and can be verbally abusive. I know that he was unfaithful to me, at least once...”*

According to the social exchange theory there is a lot going on here. To explain it... it has some more mathematical terms. “CL” stands for “comparison level.” She has her own standard for what behavior is acceptable. Her standard... we will call “CL.”

Now every relationship *also* has what we’ll call a “CL-alt”). This is shorthand for “comparison level of alternatives.” There are other men out there. He is not the only fish in the sea. She can compare THIS GUY with what else is available. So the social exchange theory says that we evaluate relationships by making use of our own standards for behavior... and what else is available. ... So here we go!

#1. If what we have (here expressed as “outcome”) is greater than our standard of acceptable behavior (in other words “CL”)... and our standard

of acceptable behavior is greater than whatever else is available (the “CL-alt”)... we will see our relationship as: satisfying... stable... but dependent.

#2. If what we have (“outcome”) is greater than our alternatives (possible relationships with someone else who is available – our “CL-alt”)... and our alternatives are greater than our standard of acceptable behavior (in other words “CL”)... then our relation is: satisfying... stable... and non-dependent.

... [P A U S E] ...

OK... I think that I will bring you out of the classroom (now.) I hope that you enjoyed your visit. Everybody wake-up. (The last few minutes have all been a dream.) I don’t want to spend any more of our time on this social exchange theory stuff. In the college classroom... I would carry it further. But let me ask you what I eventually ask them. Does it make you feel uncomfortable to think in terms like this about all of your relationships...?

If we did not know that there was a better way... this would all make plenty of sense... and perhaps seem wise and useful. But here is how I think we (as believers) can use all of this. ... The social exchange theory really breaks down for us – the best way for people who do not have Christ in their life... to build and maintain relationships. It represents some of the best worldly thinking. It seems to make a lot of sense.

But do you know what else (Christian Brother and Sister)? It also represents yours and my thinking – when we are not walking with Christ. It is so easy for you and I to treat our relationships in the same way that non-believers... who know NO BETTER... and do not have the tools that are available to your and I. The social exchange theory says that all of this

cost analysis (Rewards MINUS cost = the outcome of the relationship... CL... CL-alt stuff) happens subconsciously. Mostly we are not actively aware that we are doing it.

I am not willing to throw all of it out as garbage... because I think that the natural mind DOES do this. Natural man does it... and I think that believers do it too. ... We do it when we treat our relationships carnally (or fleshly... at times when Christ is not piloting our life.) It is good for us to see the contrast between building and maintaining relationships along the lines of the social exchange theory... and what Christ asks of us... and gives us the power to do.

Do you evaluate your relationships in terms of what the pay-off will be for you...? ... **[P A U S E]** ... Now... lets be clear. I am not talking about abusive relationships. Christ would still want you to LOVE the abuser – but I don't think that He wants you to keep yourself in a situation where you are in harms way. (Other Biblical principles come into play here... such as treating your body as the Temple of God.) ... But in some (or several) relationships... is the pay-off (reward minus coast) a major factor for your having and keeping it?

In our passage of Scripture (today) the disciples of Jesus seem to be evaluating relationships according to the social exchange theory. Jesus has far more important things to be concerned with... than being with kids and infants. There is no pay-off for Him to put His hand on these kids' head and blessing them. ... *“Scram! ... Get out of here! ... Shooo!”*

The disciples were out of touch with the Lord's loving heart. Here's the thing that we should all recognize. ... His own disciples (again) showed

how very little they understood of the Lord's great love for people. What they did (in the passage we are about to read) was about as bad as the Pharisee (which we saw in last week's passage) looking down his nose at the praying tax-collector. (*"Oh Lord... I thank thee that I am not at all like this tax-collector..."*) Today we see how Jesus' followers were as out of touch with Jesus' attitude – as *that* Pharisee was. ... This is why I named today's sermon: "Being in Touch with the Lord's Heart."

Luke 18:15-17

Luke 18:15–17 is one of the Bible's most cherished accounts. Three of the Gospel writers included it... (Matthew 19... Mark 10... and Luke 18)... as they tell us about Jesus. It is frequently taught to children... to entire congregations as children are brought for child dedications... as justification for ministries such as Awana - and rightfully so.

In the first century... Jewish households were patriarchal — men came first... followed by women and children. ... Adult men were the key members of society... women quite secondary... and children were to be seen but not heard.

That Jesus receives children and takes time to bless them... in the midst of a pressure-packed ministry... is touching and reveals much about our Lord's concern for all people (including the poor and outcast – who have no pay-off to give back to us.)

Luke is the Gospel writer who reveals that (even) infants were being brought to Jesus. ... The reason children were brought to Him was that Jesus might simply put His hand on their head and ask God (the Father) to show them His favor in some obvious way. This was a popular thing for

mothers to do with the rabbis in the first century... but it doesn't seem that it was a rabbi's highest priority. One commentary writer suggested that it was a degrading task that was left for rabbi's with lower status. (Important rabbi's would not bother themselves.)

Well the scene of our passage today is not all that hard for us to imagine. A number of cheerful families probably stood waiting... chatting... with little ones in arms and other children scurrying around. The way that this is worded is that these mothers of children kept coming to have their kids blessed by Jesus. (So it must have been a very long line.)

But the giddiness of the mothers was about to cease abruptly. The disciples were having a few words with the people of little pay-off... and some were turning away and moving off. ... The Twelve apparently did not approve of the parents' bothering Jesus. Verse 15 says: "*When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.*"

This word "**rebuke**" is the word ***epitimaō*** {ep-ee-tee-mah'-o} which means "to threaten... to harshly admonish or rebuke." It is used of the Lord's rebuke of evil spirits... of His rebuke of the winds... and of His rebuke of a fever. They did not just mildly ask them (with any sense of politeness) to come back some other time when Jesus was less busy. They were harsh.

This was not the first time the disciples had attempted to "get rid of" people. They wanted to send the crowd away hungry... but Jesus fed them (Matt. 14:15ff); and they tried to stop the Canaanite woman from asking Jesus to heal her daughter (Matt. 15:21ff)... but Jesus answered her prayer. ... The

Twelve did not yet have the compassion of their Master... but it would come in due time.

I am going to draw your attention (now) to Mark's narrative of this event for just a moment. Mark adds a detail that we don't see in Luke's account.

Mark 10:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ *But when Jesus saw it, **he was indignant** and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*

Mark adds that Jesus was MUCH displeased. The word in the New Testament's original language is **aganakteo {ag-an-ak-teh'-o}** which means "**to move with indignation.**" Jesus was upset with the disciples! The Lord had great love for these children and their parents. For them to be shunned by the disciples **infuriated** Him. They were totally out of line to treat these people this way. This is one of the rare occasions when the Lord is said to have displayed deep emotion. Nothing could have displeased Him *more* than this interfering act.

Does Jesus have the same reaction to us... when we wrongfully decide who we will receive as our friends and relationships...? ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Our passage today (very simply) is about TWO matters: (1) how we receive others – **and** – (2) how God receives us!

Luke 18:16-17

Remember that Luke made it a point to say that some of the children being brought to Him were infants. So when verse 16 says "**to such as these belongs the kingdom of God**" - it includes INFANTS.

What is the quality of being of children... and especially those characterized as “infants”? What is distinctive about a newborn? Helplessness! ... Jesus has in mind here the objective state that every child who has ever lived (regardless of race... culture... or background) has experienced — namely... *helpless dependence*.

A newborn (naked... with flailing hands and feet lifted toward the sky) is a heart-wrenching profile of helplessness. ... And unlike any other creature... this helplessness extends for several years. ... No child would survive its early years without the help of others.

Eduard Schweizer (Professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich) wrote:

But this is the reason they are blessed—just because they [the little children] have nothing to show for themselves. They cannot count on any achievements of their own—their hands are empty like those of a beggar. Jesus enlarges the promise to include everyone. With an authority such as only God can claim, he promises the Kingdom to those whose faith resembles the empty hand of a beggar. Such faith is possible because they have no achievements of their own nor any conceptions of God which can intrude between them and God.

Every child born into the world is absolutely... completely... totally... actually helpless. ... And so it is with every child who is born into the kingdom of God. ... Children of the kingdom enter it helpless.

If Billy Graham enters the kingdom... it will not be because he has personally preached to more people than any man in history. ... It will not be because he has remained impeccable in his finances... when so many other evangelists have failed. ... It will not be because he has been a

faithful husband. ... It will not be because (despite his fame) he has remained a humble... self-effacing... kind man.

When Billy Graham enters the kingdom... it will be because he came to Christ as a helpless child. ... It will be because of God's undeserved kindness toward Billy's helplessness.

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress:
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.*

If you would enter the kingdom... this is the only way you can come.

We tell children to behave like adults. Christ tells adults to behave like children. ... This does not mean we are to be childish but rather to be child-like.

What are the elements of such childlikeness? Let me give you the four that Dr. Kent Hughes has summarized for us.

Unmitigated Trust

Children trust others for everything—their food, their lodging, the arms of others who carry them about. Regarding trust in God, the child's ability to believe has never been polluted by an evil suggestion... or burdened with superstition... or perverted by falsehoods. ... These little ones are the opposite of the skeptical theologians who dominate mainstream media today. Those who receive the kingdom like a little child trust Jesus for everything to do with salvation and life.

Untutored Humility

Children do not engage in the various forms of pride of adulthood. Unlike the Pharisees... little children are not proud of their virtues—“*God, I thank you that I am not like all other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get*”. A child does not battle self-righteousness in coming to Christ—“*Lord, I have been constant in my attendance for years. I have sat at the Lord’s Table for half a century. I give a lot of money to missions.*” Self-righteousness is impossible in a child!

Furthermore... a little child is free from the pride of knowledge. Intellectual conceit is impossible. But children are teachable. They receive the gospel without proposing amendments to it.

Untarnished Receptivity

Children know how to receive a gift—they simply take it. At their first birthday (they are not sure what a gift is.) ... As two-year-olds (if they have siblings) they understand well enough. And by the time they are three... they are really into receptivity! The wrapping paper flies!

As David Gooding explains: “A little child takes its food, its parents’ love and protection, because they are given, without beginning to think of whether it deserves them or whether it is important enough to merit such attention. So must we all receive God’s kingdom and enter into it (see 18:17).”

The soul that receives the kingdom is grace-oriented. It is open to the unmerited favor of God.

Unabashed Love

Children easily return love for loving gifts. Enthusiastic hugs and kisses and multiple “Thanks” are showered on the giver.

... [**PAUSE**] ...

Do you receive others (initiate... build... and maintain relationships in your life)... the way God wants you to...? AND ... has God received you into His Kingdom.

Receive His free gift of salvation – trusting in Him as a child would.