

Living Out The Grace of God Together

Lesson 1B

I. Introduction

- a. The Bible tells us that personal relationships are **important** to our growth in Christ and social science research has established that satisfying relationships weigh heavily on the degree to which one finds satisfaction in life.
- b. There are **five** essential elements that create satisfying and long lasting personal relationships. Relationships are the soil in which these elements grow.
 1. **Commitment**= The internal acknowledgement that the relationship holds value and therefore is worth sustaining and maintaining whatever the cost.
 2. **Shared Values**= Those attitudes and beliefs which are deemed important and thus drive personal opinions, decisions and actions.
 3. **Mutual Respect**= That inner filter that identifies thoughts, words and behavior that are assessed as inconsistent with valuing the personhood of another; the holding of another in high esteem.
 4. **Self Disclosure**= The revealing of the true self (fears, feelings, attitudes, facts, desires, concerns) to another.
 5. **Forgiveness**= The willingness and ability to release another from a debt owed regardless of the form the debt takes. (Intentional words, behaviors, hurts, slights, insults, abuse, neglect, etc)
- c. It is the experiences we have in our personal relationships that grow in us a **deep** spiritual understanding of Christ in us as we deal with the issues and concerns presented in our relationships. *Heb 5:7-8 Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do. The Msg*
- d. It is in relationship to others that we are put to the test and we make **full proof** (for our own recognition) of the transformational ground accomplished by the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.
- e. It is in Christ and through our relationships that the hidden man of the spirit is made **manifest** and we come to experience the meaning of grace; grace received and grace poured out. *1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. KJV*
- f. It is in relationship that we learn to **live Christ**. There is no substitute for this process and this explains why living as a recluse will not produce the Christ-like growth that is necessary in a truly transformed life.
- g. In every relationship between a believer and another person, the principle task is for the believer to live out and to present himself as he is in Christ...his **true self**. This is enabled in believers as recipients of God's grace.
- h. As recipients of "God's favor" we receive an active power. Grace received is the **power** to live authentic lives in our personal relationships; this is living Christ. *1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. KJV*
- i. We recognize the effects of the operation of grace in our relations with others when we respond to them as Christ **responds to us**.

II. Recognizing Grace in Operation

- a. We recognize that the enemy of grace and/or the Spirit in our relations with others is our own preoccupation with **self**. *Rom 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. KJV*
- b. **Preoccupation** with self may occur in several ways. For example:
 1. When thought processes about your own problems or concerns or desires **keep** you from engaging with another. *Acts 10:13-15 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. KJV*
 2. When the only thing you care to talk about is your **own** problems or concerns or desires or accomplishments. *1 Cor 13:4 Love cares more for others than for self. The Msg*
 3. When, in your own mind, you devalue or do not respect the person who **seeks** your time and attention. *Heb 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. KJV*
 4. When you keep a conversation superficial, choosing to hide or not to disclose the inner truth when it is **appropriate** to do so (often obfuscating the true emotion behind a subject you are talking about). *Eph 4:15-16 God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love — like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love. The Msg*

Living Out The Grace of God Together

Lesson 1B

5. When you encounter someone who **needs** your time and attention and you fail to respond to their need because of your own priorities, needs, concerns, desires, etc. *Luke 10:33-35 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. KJV*
- c. Fulfilling the righteousness of the law and meeting the intent of the prophets can be **summed up** by living in a loving, authentic relationship with the people in our lives. *Matt 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. KJV*
- d. One requirement of such Christ-likeness is that we will manifest **conscious** vigilance over our own thoughts, impulses, and words. *2 Cor 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; KJV*
- e. In the same way that we would like to be understood by others, our communication with them is **empathic** which calls for us to encourage others to express sincere emotion and their heartfelt beliefs about any subject. *Luke 6:31 "Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! The Msg*
- f. Our **speech** is clear and direct, avoiding our own inclination toward insincerity, subterfuge and double meanings. *James 5:12 And since you know that he cares, let your language show it. Don't add words like "I swear to God" to your own words. Don't show your impatience by concocting oaths to hurry up God. Just say yes or no. Just say what is true.*
- g. Our inner attitude (expressed by **self-talk**) toward all others is accepting and loving. *James 2:1-4 My dear friends, don't let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith. If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him and you say to the man in the suit, "Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!" and either ignore the street person or say, "Better sit here in the back row," haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges who can't be trusted? The Msg*
- h. When **confronted** by unpleasantness on the part of others we are gracious and forgiving *1 Peter 2:23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: KJV*
- i. We assume that we **do not** understand who others really are and seek more intimate knowledge of them by asking questions. We are genuinely interested in their person. *Prov 15:14 An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth; The Msg*
- j. We assume the **good** intention of others in our transactions with them *1 Cor 13:7 (Love) Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end. The Msg*
- k. We are completely **safe**, therefore we have no need of defensiveness, deceptiveness, or hiding. Nothing but complete openness comes out of our mouths when we reveal ourselves to others. *1 Peter 2:23 He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right.*
- l. We do not **look for** fault, blame or accusation against others; we free them to be completely open and honest with us. *1 Cor 13:5-6 (love) Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,*
- m. We have no **expectation** that others must meet, but rather allow them to express and to be who they truly are in every moment of time. *1 Cor 13:4 Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.*

III. Application

- a. One of the biggest challenges and most persistent barriers to authentic Christian living for most is the ability to drop masks and pretenses in personal relationships and to reveal one's true self. Do you struggle with this?
- b. To what extent do you see grace in operation in your own personal relationships?
- c. Living this level of grace is a function of walking in the Spirit. To what extent do you live this way?
- d. Living out the grace we have received also involves learning self-management and communication skills. Do you possess these skills? Do you use them consistently?