

“BACK TO THE BASICS”

by Rom A. Pegram (2/9/20)

As we begin our new worship series called ‘Relationship Rescue,’ I want to start by asking this very important question: WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? And is what you’re looking for in a relationship—whether close friend, spouse, or girlfriend/boyfriend—realistic? Often, a major problem in relationships isn’t imperfections, but expectations. Would you agree?

So, *has anyone here ever experienced the perfect relationship?* I’ve always said ... **Jane is ‘perfect’ ... for me!** And I mean that ... and that’s a gift from God! But, again, one of the major problems in relationships isn’t imperfections, but expectations. Are we being realistic in our relationships? Or have we bought into ‘myths’ this world pushes? And what does God’s word have to say about our approach to relationships in this life?

Let’s begin today with a word from the Psalmist—apparently not having a very good day. Here’s Psalm 144:7a-b: “Reach down from heaven and rescue me; rescue me from deep waters....” Have you ever prayed a prayer like that?

Something else I’ve said often, when working with couples on their relationships, is this: **Putting man and woman together is one of God’s practical jokes; it’s like ... ‘let me create two of the most opposite creatures I can create ... and see if they can get along!’** Have you ever felt that way before? And yet, going back to the very beginning, we read this (Gen. 2:18): Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right [perfect] for him.” So, God thought it good to make man, then wo-man. But we sometimes need guidance, don’t we?

As we begin this series, *we’re going to do our best to dispel three common myths about relationships.* So, here’s the first truth about messy things called relationships:

EXPECT PROBLEMS IN MY RELATIONSHIPS (*the myth of perfection*). We’re going to see this truth through the first couple in scripture—Adam and Eve; I believe we can learn a lot from them; here’s the first part of their story (Gen. 3:1-7, NLT):

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”² “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied.³ “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”⁴ “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman.⁵ “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”⁶ The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.⁷ At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Looking at Adam and Eve—the first man and woman in a relationship in scripture, we see that ... *there are going to be problems!* ‘No perfect relationship here, when they’re affected by INTERNAL PRESSURES, like:

- DOUBT – *If you’ve ever been in a serious relationship before, it’s natural for doubts to creep in.* You wonder about things like: What if this person stopped loving me? Am I loving the right person for me? Am I supposed to be with somebody else? *Men and women also fall into the problem of comparisons.* Are we as much in love as *that* couple? Do they love each other more? Does my husband live up to *my list*—all I want in a companion? Or am I able to be all he needs me to be? Then we see in relationships other pressures like...
- FEAR – We’re afraid. What if this person leaves me? Or what if they really find out who I am? (‘Anyone remember Rita Hayworth? She once said, with some personal insight, “Men go to bed with Gilda, but wake up with me.” Some were in love with her characters—not the real Rita Hayworth...’) What if they find out who I am? The internal pressure of FEAR can grip us, can’t it?

Even in this first relationship with Adam and Eve, we find problems, don’t we? If Genesis, Chapter 3, reminds us of anything, it’s this: *There is no such thing as a perfect relationship!* So, if you’re waiting for perfection, you may as well stop right now; *you’re never going to find it...*

Folks, if there was ever going to be a perfect relationship, surely it would have been God’s first couple—the first human creations, the first man and woman, in the perfect utopian place—the Garden of Eden? (Some of us that think our relationships would be better if we were just in a better place, but location has nothing to do with relationship success!) The problem is not *an imperfect place*, but that we’re *imperfect people*—just like Adam and Eve, after the fall. So internal pressures ... and *external...*

Question: In the part of the Genesis story we just read, where the serpent got the first couple to eat from the Tree of Life, *who was to blame?* ‘Any ideas? I could tell you a few jokes right now, but I’ll spare you. The serpent (i.e. the devil, Satan, etc.) is to blame—the one who brought unnecessary pressure to bear on Adam and Eve’s relationship...

Yes, they (and we) are responsible for their own actions, but there was *an outside source of pressure too*—very much like in our relationships. These pressures may be societal pressures, sexual pressures, or cultural pressures—like the frequent availability of divorce. “If everyone’s doing it, it must be okay!” (I know divorce isn’t that simple, but isn’t that the mindset that gets many in trouble?) The fact is ... there will be problems—from both internal and external sources. (It even happens to couples committed to following God’s best plan.) So, what are we supposed to do? Here it is...

ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS (*the myth of blame*). The truth is, we all need to take responsibility for *our own behavior* ... in our relationships; we have to own *our* stuff; here’s the next part of our story (Gen. 3:12-13, NLT)...

¹² The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

When problems come into your relationship—and they will, it’s easy to lay blame with another person ... or an outward source, like the serpent...

Do any of you remember the comedian ‘Flip Wilson?’ What did he used to say? “The devil made me do it!”? Decades ago, now, he had a character in his comedy routine named Geraldine Jones whose famous lines included things like, “The devil made me buy this dress!” The devil made me do it. The point is, we’re good at blaming others, aren’t we? Just like Adam...

There’s pressure to conform to the world’s standards; that’s what was happening way back in the Garden of Eden—pressure to give in to temptation. Today, there’s also societal pressures, sexual pressures, and cultural pressures—from the outside.

BUT, at the end of the day, external pressures are only pressures. No one forces you to give in. We still have free will; we can say ‘yes’ to God’s best for our relationships ... and ‘no’ to these pressures—inward & outward (‘by God’s grace’). This’s where Adam and Eve found themselves—tempted to give into these pressures...

So, if we go back to verses 12-13, when God confronts Adam and Eve about eating the forbidden fruit, what happened? *Let’s review.* Verse 12: The man replied, “It was the woman *you gave me* [italics mine] who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” Jokes always seem to hint it was Eve’s fault. But, if you’ll notice here, Adam’s really blaming God for his sin, isn’t he? ‘The woman *you gave me*...

Then God confronts Eve in Verse 13: Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.” You know the old saying ‘They didn’t have a leg to stand on?’ That’s pretty much the case here. We all love to ‘pass the buck,’ don’t we? We love to blame others ... and so it was with the first couple of this world...

With relationship problems, folks, nobody likes to say they’re responsible! It’s easier to point the finger and say, “It’s his fault!” or “It’s her fault!” or “The devil made me do it!” So, first, ask yourself this very important question: *What’s my responsibility in this relationship?* And then, think about this: When the problems come and you start taking responsibility, ask yourself: *How can God use this problem to grow my character?* You see, one of the ways God uses relationships is to help grow our character—to help us be more and more like Christ. *So, how we doing?*

So, IT’S NOT JUST A PRACTICAL JOKE! God’s purpose is to make us just like his Son, Jesus. And one of the ways he shapes us is through the everyday challenges of ... *relationships!* So, put on your big boy (or girl) pants, step up to the plate, and take responsibility for *your* part in whatever it is you’re going through. Don’t take the easy way out. Know that God is working for your eternal good—even in the midst of your relationships. And here’s the final relational truth for today—the third myth we need to overcome (*self-reliance*):

INVITE GOD TO BE THE CENTER OF MY RELATIONSHIPS (*the myth of self-reliance*). You see, ‘relationship rescue’ begins ... when God becomes the center of your relationship; *leaning on God is how God created us*. This is the ultimate truth I want to leave you with today—the big lesson from Genesis, Chapter 3; *we can’t leave God out*—what Adam & Eve tried to do... That’s ‘self-reliance.’ We live in a world that says, ‘You can do this! All by yourself’ ... even though we weren’t created to do that...

Folks, this is one of those outside pressures that works on relationships every day. It’s *a myth* promoted by most romance books ... and it’s promoted by Hollywood, and it goes something like this: *If two people would just love each other enough, then the relationship would succeed*. And it’s so about two people just loving each other *enough*. ... But that formula’s only partially correct. You see, for a relationship to succeed, *not only must two people be committed to each other, they must also be committed to God!*

And that’s a choice you and I have to make—to allow God to be the center of our relationships. I want you to notice both the *consequence* in Genesis 3, along with the *hope*. Let me start with (Gen. 3) Verse 14 (NLT)...

¹⁴ Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. ¹⁵ And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” ¹⁶ Then he said to the woman, “I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.” ¹⁷ And to the man he said, “Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. ¹⁸ It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

There’s a pattern here of consequence/hope, and consequence/hope—the end of Verse 15’s actually a prophecy. “He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” This is a prophetic reference to Jesus. Jesus is going to come and crush the head of the serpent, representing of course the devil or Satan here...

‘Anyone remember Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of the Christ’—about the end of Jesus’ life? While Jesus was in the garden praying, prior to his arrest, *a serpent appeared*. When Jesus is at the most vulnerable time of his life, a snake is used to represent the presence of Satan. This is from Genesis 3. And, though not quite biblical, in the movie Jesus stomps the snake, which represents this prophecy from Genesis that says ‘He will strike your head’; in the movie, Jesus stomping the snake represents Satan’s defeat...

So, even though these consequences in Genesis 3 are grave—for both the man and wo-man, *there is hope left for the relationship*. God, here, makes clear the relationship

is broken, but it can ultimately be restored *if he's at the center*. That was up to Adam and Eve; and that's up to US! We too must invite God to be the center of our relationships ... if we want God's very best in our relationships. That's the only way we'll have real success—if God is at the center. So, what better way to kick off a 'relationship rescue' than with this in mind. Folks, what's our ultimate decision need to be today? Here it is...

MY DECISION TODAY: GOD WILL BE THE CENTER OF MY RELATIONSHIPS. If you're someone who's in the dating stage (and I'm going to talk about that more next week), this is the best time to put God in the center of your relational life! Or if you're married—well into your relationship life ... you can make God the center of your relationship too! Now is the time. Some of you have already lived the pain of a relationship that left God out—the consequences seen in Genesis 3. If that's the case, God offers you HOPE, too. Wherever you are, if you choose to make God the center of your relationship, you'll discover God will come into that relationship ... and offer you HOPE! Isn't that what we all want?