

A PERFECT PAIR

Accepting and Appreciating Differences

Remarkable Relationships (Part 2)

Text: Genesis 2:24-25; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Facing The Curve

An email recently came to the Support Department of a leading relationship software company. "Dear Tech Support," the letter began. "Last year I upgraded from Boyfriend 5.0 to Husband 1.0 and noticed a distinct slow-down in overall system performance. The slow-down was particularly evident in the flower and jewelry applications, which operated flawlessly under Boyfriend 5.0. In addition, Husband 1.0 *uninstalled* many other valuable programs, such as Romance 9.5 and Personal Attention 6.5. It then *installed* undesirable programs such as NASCAR 6.0, NFL 5.1 and Golf Clubs 4.1. Conversation 8.0 no longer runs, and Housecleaning 2.6 simply crashes the system. Please note that I have tried running Nagging 5.3 to fix these problems, but to no avail. What can I do? Signed, Desperate."

"Dear Desperate," the folks at Tech Support replied, "We're sure we can help you. First, keep in mind, Boyfriend 5.0 is an Entertainment Package, while Husband 1.0 is an operating system. Please enter the command: `ithoughtyoulovedme.HTML`, then try to download Tears 6.2 as you also install the Guilt 3.0 update. If these applications work as designed, Husband 1.0 should then automatically run the applications Jewelry 2.0 and Flowers 3.5. However, remember, overuse of the above application can cause Husband 1.0 to default to Grumpy Silence 2.5 or Beer 6.1. Please note that Beer 6.1 is a very bad program that will download the Snoring Loudly Beta... In summary, Husband 1.0 is a great program, but it does have limited memory and cannot integrate new applications quickly. You might consider buying additional software to improve memory and overall performance. We recommend Lingerie 7.7. Good Luck! Signed, Tech Support.

Three Phases of Relationship

It is interesting, isn't it, what high hopes we bring into our relationships when first we enter them? Whether it's a marriage, a friendship, or a workplace relationship, everybody brings great expectations for the connection at the start. We're aware of all the things we have in common, all the good feelings we have in each other's company, all the great potential for what we can be and build together. This is what we might call the Fawning or Romance Phase of a relationship. The ancient Greeks used the word "Eros" to describe this kind of bond. It is a time when everyone's hopes are rising and the kite of connection seems to soar up and up.

Eros is essentially "BECAUSE Love." I love you BECAUSE you bring me flowers or touch me that way. I love you BECAUSE you make me look good and feel good. As pleasant as it is, Eros is an intrinsically narcissistic stage of relationship. We don't really know the other person yet. We're so drunk on the romance we can't truly see the other yet. What we mainly know is how nice WE look and WE feel when reflected in the mirror of that person's shining presence. When I am with you, I see what a beautiful and valuable mate, co-worker, or friend I am. I love you because of what I experience ME to be when I am with you.

And then, without fail, the flight becomes familiar and more difficult. The pressures and winds of life start buffeting the relationship and we enter into a period where Eros starts to dip and another kind of love has to start working or the program will definitely crash. The Greeks called this sort of love "Philia." It's the word we associate with a filial or friendship bond – the connection that grows or dies as we really learn about each other. In the Learning Phase of a relationship, we start to see that the other person is not just an extension of our own selves but actually a whole separate self – somebody with a set of attitudes, gifts, and issues different than ours.

This phase can also feel good. "Thank God, she's got better math and cooking skills than I do and isn't that wonderful!" "Wow, he's helping me learn to play golf and can fix stuff that's broken. Isn't this great?!" And, then, we start to see that there are some *annoying* aspects to our differences too. "Gosh, she didn't do that thing at all like I expected. I would never do it that way." Or "He doesn't seem to care at all about that value or need, like I do. We're going to have to fix that."

Philia is essentially "IF Love." In the Fawning Phase of a relationship, there aren't any "if's"; we're all in. But in the Learning Phase certain *conditions and concerns* start to set in. "I will love you and be for you, IF the benefits of our relationship outweigh the downsides... IF you just don't blow it too badly... IF I just don't start looking or feeling too badly." Beneath the surface is this growing sense that there are some things about you that clearly need to change, some programs that need to be reconfigured or replaced.

In time, the very things we so appreciated about the other person start to drive us crazy. "I loved what an organized person you were; but now you're *so* rigid!" OR "I loved what a carefree and outgoing person you were; but now, will you *ever* get focused or set a boundary!?" At first, I'm thinking, "IF I can just change you in these ways, all will be fine." But then I start to despair that maybe you'll never change. I thought we were the perfect pair, but maybe I fell in love with, or hired, or took a job with, or befriended the wrong person. Maybe I need to move on. And so, at least 50% of the time in marriage, and more frequently in other kinds of relationships, we do move on. We either give up and go or give up and stay but, either way, the kite of that

remarkable relationship we once hoped we had crashes into the earth of the regular. Sound familiar?

The sad thing is that we so often quit before we've gotten to the place where all the magic happens, where all the dramatic growth of character and joy in connections are ultimately found. You see, it's only when Eros and Philia have plummeted that most of us get to the place where we can find the upward draft of the third kind of love the Bible describes. It's only when BECAUSE LOVE and IF LOVE finally fail us that most of us discover the power and importance of "IN SPITE OF LOVE." The Greek word the Bible uses for this third sort of love is "Agape." Agape is the word Paul used when he spoke of love in 1 Corinthians 13. I will love you in spite of the fact that we're so different that it will take patience and kindness, politeness and perseverance, humility and trust — in short, a love like God's — to keep this relationship from falling and failing.

Agape is what leads us into the Yearning for Union Phase of relationship. When you see a really remarkable marriage, family, friendship or work relationship, you are seeing people undergoing this long and never quite finished process of uniting with one another in the highest form of love possible. In the weeks ahead, we're going to look together at many of the key ingredients to establishing this kind of powerful bond with people. But there are two questions in particular that can help us on our flight path.

Two Key Questions Needed to Build Unity

When we're young, most of relate to people out of our insecurity about whether or not we really have any valuable gifts. And, then, as we start to identify our gifts, another insidious disability takes over. We start resting in and seeing others through the lens of our own strengths. If we're gifted as organizers or communicators, we think that others should be. If we're gifted with empathy or flexibility, we get irritated at people who seem too decisive or rigid. We get all wound up in our sense of the value WE bring to life. "If only a woman were more like a man," Henry Higgins wonders. "If only he were more like me," she wonders.

That's why one of the most helpful questions we can ever ask ourselves is this: "What is it about me that is limited?" What, in spite of my many notable strengths, would be missing in my life and relational circles if everyone were just like me? The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "**If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be**" (1 Cor 12:17-19).

If you and I cannot get to this place of realistic humility, if we cannot live daily from an authentic awareness of our own limitations and our desperate need of the different gifts that others bring, we will never grow up, never go up in our relationships. We'll be like an ear or eyeball sitting on the ground. We'll be like half a kite, wondering why we

can't get seem to get airborne. So ask yourself: What is it about me that is tragically limited without the different gifts that my lover, my workmates, my friends, or brothers and sisters in Christ bring? If you are struggling to name those limitations, ask others! Believe me, they've noticed!

Then hear again, a second bit of wisdom St. Paul offers. Paul writes: **"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor 12:21-22)**. In other words – and here's the SECOND question I invite you to sit with: What is it about the people around you that needs to be celebrated? I'm not saying that nothing about others needs changing. We'll talk more about a strategy for that next week. But how many times has a spouse, a friend, or a co-worker been fired for the things they lacked, only for the people left behind to later discover all the indispensable gifts that person had actually been bringing that had never been celebrated? Why? Because we were so busy noticing their faults. Think of how obvious to Jesus the flaws of his disciple, Simon, were. Jesus saw how insecure the man could be under pressure. Yet he also saw the grit of which Simon was capable. So instead of giving him the nickname, Windbag or Sandy, as the other disciples probably regarded him, Jesus called him "Peter," literally "Rocky." And Peter became the Rock of the early church.

In his wonderful book, *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*, business guru, Warren Bennis, describes the characteristics of those great workgroups that produced the most high-flying innovations in history – from the design of the 747 to the creation of the graphical user interface that spawned modern computing. What Bennis discovered is that at the heart of every one of those great groups was a leader with a rare capacity to notice and celebrate the very different gifts all the people in that body brought to the party, in spite of their limitations. These leaders lived with a burning passion to unite these gifts in a way that could bring forth the best.

Why don't you do likewise? Instead of naming and shaming people for their limitations, start delighting in their differences. Spend the next month celebrating the gifts of your spouse, your children, your workmates, and friends. Tell them what you consider about them to be indispensable to your life and that of others. Author Dave Meurer writes: "A great marriage is not when the 'perfect couple' comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences." **"For this reason,"** the Bible says, **"a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh"** (Gen 2:24-25). Don't you yearn for that union?

CBS newsman, Charles Osgood, once told the story of two stroke victims who shared life in a convalescent home, and with this I'll close. Margaret's injury had incapacitated her whole left side. Ruth's stroke had damaged the functioning of her right-side. What made these conditions particularly sad was that both of these ladies had once been accomplished pianists. One day, however, the director of the convalescent center sat

them down together on a piano bench. He encouraged them to play with their one hand half of a single piece that both of them knew. Out of that trembling partnership there arose the strains of a magnificent music they couldn't have created any other way.

Don't you see, all of us are angels with but one wing? Now and again, however, the Grace of God comes to us and gives us the vision to recognize one another and to find together the heights of new flight. The Apostle Paul put it this way: "**The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts**" (1 Cor 12:12). And what that body can do – when each part recognizes its own limitations, when each part realizes the indispensable strengths the other parts offer -- is nothing short of *remarkable*.