



The Journey of Thomas

Building Healthy Safe Relationships

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The Journey of Thomas is rooted in the value of healthy relationships. It is founded on developing the skill of building relationships rather than just falling into them. I have taken the opportunity to begin this series on relationships with a foundational message. In subsequent lessons we will learn more specific practical skills that will help to undergird this chapter.

John chapter 15 verse 15

“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends.

When I look back on my understanding of the history of our world, I see most of the wars, the division, the rise and fall of many world cultures; I see that relationship seems to be the root problem of all of the problems of our world!

If we are going to be a part of the solution of the breakdown of our world, we must choose to be a relater and in that, to be a person who is committed to good relationship building. The problem often is that we don't know how to build good relationships!

Scripture clearly states that we have two basic commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. All of the commandments are summed up in these two.

When the Lord God instructs us to refrain from some behavior or to abstain from something, it is not just an arbitrary rule that He just thought He would throw down and see how we respond! Sin is sin because it negatively affects relationship either between us and God, or between us and someone else. That is the bottom line. This shows God's heart for us; that we learn how to love Him and how to love one another. Please allow me to share what I see as a model for healthy and godly relationships.

John chapter 15 verse 15 – 16 says: *“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.”*

I firmly believe that when I am introduced to someone I will know them forever. I may forget their name, I may forget that I have met them but in a situation where I am reminded of our meeting, I will likely remember that we had met. I may get to know someone then experience something that

could bring this relationship into disrepair or distance but this doesn't change the reality that I know them. Knowing this brings me to be so much more careful to respect each and every relationship that I have and to follow, to the best of my ability, godly stewardship of my relationship with others.

If you are introduced to someone new you may have no earthly idea of where that relationship will go. If it is someone of the opposite sex and you are single, you could be married to them someday. If it is a meeting of happenstance, you could end up being an employee of theirs, or you could become quite intimate in friendship. Do you have forethought about how you will relate to others before you even meet them? I believe we all should develop personal relationship ethics that we stand on so that we are not stumbled by meeting new people. I believe that these verses in scripture give us a structure to build those ethics on.

Honesty

In this passage I see three basic elements in healthy relationships. Jesus has called us to first of all, be honest. In building new relationships I try to always begin with one rule, honesty. Without honesty, all relationships have the potential of damage. When we meet someone, if we are not walking in the spirit of honesty then we could be heading towards a faulty foundation for the relationship. If I may be so honest as to say that we could even be building the relationship in fraud!

Jesus said that he told us everything that His Father told Him. He held nothing back and informs us of all that we need to know to have a good relationship with Him. I have seen relationships go to ruin over dishonesty and lies. Marriages go to separation and divorce over deception and holding back from one another.

Song of Solomon exhorts us to deal with "the little foxes that destroy the vineyard". I believe this means to be honest with our intended marriage mate and to allow God to heal the wounds before the marriage. Being honest about our past is imperative if we are going to make a healthy marriage.

Can you imagine meeting a new friend and they invited us to go see a movie with them. It may come about that the movie they picked out is not something I would find edifying and given my usual pattern I would not choose to go. But, this time rather than risk this new friend's questions about my life I say yes and against my better judgment I go ahead anyway.

Well, if this friendship continues to build I have laid a foundation that I am open to seeing movies that in my conviction are not for me, I have in effect given an image of me that is not true and I may have to later confess that really didn't enjoy the movie and made a wrong decision by attending it. This is laying a wrong foundation for honest relationship and can be fraudulent.

Choose our Relationships

Of course, I know that we meet people that we do not choose to meet. I understand that we engage in relationships with others that if given the chance we might not choose to build a close friendship with but none the less, we are in a relationship with them. I know full well that given my

broken life, Jesus might not really appreciate all of the sin in my life and relates to me in spite of my wrong choices. So, what does it mean to choose our relationships?

When I shake the hand of a person I have just met I have the opportunity to make a choice right there. How will I choose to relate to this person? What will I do with what I begin to know about this person? What internal boundaries may be appropriate as I move into life with this individual?

Do you have a set of personal relationship ethics that you operate by? Things like, I will not spend alone time with anyone until I know them well enough to trust them. I will not ride in the car with someone that I have just met. I will not give out my personal information until I feel safe enough to do so. These are just a few possibilities but there are many more we can all think of I'm sure. Relationships can be much more successful if we build them on well thought out frameworks.

You may work closely with someone of the opposite sex. Will you drive to lunch with them alone – even if you are married? Will you go out to dinner with them alone just because you are the only ones eating? How will you spend time with them when you are at work? Will you have closed door meetings with them? If we think out the possible scenarios ahead of time we will be safer and more likely to walk in integrity. It is not as personal when the decision of how we will function is made without someone right in front of us while we try to decide these types of very important guidelines for our relationship experiences.

So, do you choose your relationships or do they just happen? When you have met someone new have you experienced confusion and distrust that you have to back paddle away from? Choosing our relationships also allows you to make healthy decisions about which you will spend time with. Not everyone we meet is appropriate for us to spend time with. There are those who can stumble us into temptation. There are those who can be harmful for us. If we do not choose our relationships wisely, we could find ourselves in a great big mess!

Relationships that Bear Fruit

Jesus chose for a purpose. He chose us so that we would bear fruit for the kingdom of God. There is an end result that He hopes will occur. When we choose people in relationship it is always for kingdom purposes. Sinful relationships that we get ourselves into often come from a lack of honesty, a lack of healthy boundaries, and a lack of personal choices and end up damaging us in relationship with God's kingdom.

There are relationships that are designed just for fun! That is great. Golfing buddies, cooking clubs, God certainly blesses fun when it is healthy and productive. But there are also relationships that have a serious impact for the kingdom. When you meet someone new do you ask God for His plan for this meeting? Have you considered seeking Him for the purpose He might have in mind?

Be mindful of the way sexual sin, co-dependency, chemical dependency and other addictive sins, damages relationship. When I realized that I was in the habit of attaching myself to people in emotional dependence, repentance brought me to make a decision. I will no longer bring someone

into my sin. I decided their lives may have enough troubles, they don't need mine too. Sexually, it would behoove us to make the decision that we will no longer bring another person into our sin practice. Whoa! This could certainly change the way we live. If we begin to see others as people, loved by God, then maybe we will be strong enough to not involve them in our drug addictions, our sinful relationship practices, or our relational dysfunctions.

How will God's kingdom be benefited by this meeting of someone new? Will you grow as a result of this new person in your life? Will they grow? Will this relationship develop into a team of support, encouragement, or support of others? Will this new friend become a marriage that will bear and raise godly children who will serve the kingdom of God?

So, how will you handle that new person you are going to meet tomorrow? Before you do, I urge you to consider:

- **Honesty, begins with integrity**
- **Relationship ethics – make healthy godly choices about those you meet**
- **Seek first the kingdom of God in all relationships – allow Him to bear fruit in them**

Prayer for today: Lord, I know that I haven't always handled my relationships well. My mistakes have become costly at times. Please help me to listen to truth and try to build my friendships on an honest foundation. There have been times when I have not made healthy choices and this has led to relationships that have not been what you would have had them to be. Help me to focus on the end goal in all relationships is to bear fruit for your kingdom.

Practical Application:

Take some time to ask yourself some honest questions about friendships that you have had that you are currently not in contact with because of some harm or negative communication with them. Is there some way you could have prevented this by being more honest in the beginning of your relationship? Maybe there would have been more protection if you had applied some healthy boundaries or made better choices in how you allowed the relationship to develop.

Is there someone you are currently around that you haven't been honest with? Maybe this week God will lead you to clean up some areas in this relationship with honesty. Pray about whether God would have this for you to release some heaviness that is on you at this time.

Write three feeling statements regarding the concept of personal honesty:

"I feel....."

About relationships that started out good but ended up in pain

Because....."

"I feel....."

About boundaries in forming relationships

Because....."

"I feel....."

About being honest in building new relationships

Because....."