

How to Create Meaningful Relationships

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:” Hebrews 10:24

How do we create lasting, meaningful relationships? What stops us from creating them? We recognize that God calls us into deep, rich relationship: firstly, with Him, and then, into loving connection with other people (families, friends, church family, and others). The Bible tells us to be members “*one of another*” (Rom. 12:5), and personal connections that run that deep can provide a vital sense of encouragement and support while also being a source of help and challenge in our spiritual growth. But the reality for many of us is – it’s difficult to develop these sorts of relationships. Four barriers to form meaningful relationships are being too busy, avoiding vulnerability, negative past experiences, and lack of interest.

BEING TOO BUSY

The number one reason given by most when asked why they do not engage in meaningful relationships is simply the busyness of life. We live in a society that believes the busier you are, the more important you are. We celebrate busyness, and yet, it doesn’t satisfy what we crave deep down – meaningful relationships. There has been a marked increase in the number of things we can do, the information we can process, and the opportunities around us. Often good things...but sometimes, they are things that can distract us from the priorities God’s Word calls us to. If you want to learn to combat the overly busy life that prohibits building deep connection with God and other people, consider some of the points below:

- Do a time-spent analysis by listing out the hours of the day for a week and how you spend these moments. How much time was spent with relationships?
- How can technology aid (instead of inhibiting) relationships? For example, can you turn a commute home into an accountability call, or can you use encouraging texts to share scripture with others?
- Is there a way you can build out relationships during your daily activities? Can you go grocery shopping together with a good friend? Can you work together with someone on household projects, using these times to challenge and encourage each other while also getting work done?

AVOIDING VULNERABILITY

Meaningful relationships require some level of vulnerability. It may seem easier to avoid painful topics or histories, but to build and engage well in a healthy, challenging, encouraging relationship it will require some vulnerability. The level of vulnerability may change depending on the level of relationship, but the deepest, most meaningful relationships will require a good amount of it. And although vulnerability may seem daunting and vulnerability may keep some people from building meaningful relationships, the long-term rewards of loving connections with others are worth it. Scripture teaches this and calls the Church to engage with each other in vulnerable, deep ways (John 13:34-35, Rom. 12:5, Gal 6:2, Heb. 10:24).

- What is your biggest fear when considering being vulnerable with someone?
- What is something in your life that you could be vulnerable with and share with a mentor or friend?
- How might you receive someone who is being vulnerable with you?

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NEGATIVE PAST EXPERIENCES

Some will avoid going deeper with relationships because they have been hurt in the past. Perhaps they reached out in vulnerability but were met with rejection or judgement. Perhaps they were the victims of gossip or inappropriate sharing by others. These are real and present pains in the lives of many and it should challenge us to be wise in how we are conducting our relationships. Yet, as we move forward into new relationships, we must be careful that we do not let the past dictate the potential future. Many a good deed has gone undone because of bitter memories of the past. Paul calls us to forget “*those things which are behind and reach(ing) forth unto the things which are before*” (Phil. 3:13). Applying this lesson can help us to not be held captive by the past but realize the opportunity which new relationships offer.

- Am I letting past relationships limit future relationships?
- What am I potentially missing due to this?
- What will it take for me to engage in relationships once again?

LACK OF INTEREST

A final reason individuals avoid healthy, challenging relationships is the belief that no one else is interested in such things. “I am the only one in my peer group or church family who cares about going deeper.” However, survey after survey have shown that other individuals are thinking the same thing you are. Older individuals desire to engage in mentorship but do not believe anyone would care what they have to say. Younger individuals desire mentorship but do not believe that anyone has time for them. These unspoken assumptions can keep healthy, encouraging and healing relationships separated. Be willing to take the initiative and step out in creating an environment of relationship within your church family. Share with your church leadership your desire to have a mentor or to mentor others so that leadership can help make potential connections. Prayerfully be willing to sit down by someone at lunch or grab coffee with someone, seeking purely to learn from each other and grow together. There are many who desire this level of relationship. Let the Spirit connect and begin His work.

The hindrances above can go to great lengths in keeping us from relationships which God may want to use to encourage and build us up on our spiritual walk. Reflect on these barriers. Have they been evident in your life? Let us take hold of the promises in the Scriptures knowing our “one another” is more powerful than our strongest hindrance or fear.