

No Relationship is a Waste of Time

Researching for this presentation was difficult, a bit of a struggle. There are so many directions to go, so much to say in 25 minutes. Sort of like one of your best sermons, right?

Slide 2 - Relationships can be shallow or deep, toxic or healthy, a joy or a nightmare.

I could talk about relationship boundaries in general – 10 Laws of Boundaries, a Christian approach. A workshop on its own.

You reap what you sow, Take responsibility to love one another, You have power – 6, Respect your own boundaries, Be motivated by love and not fear, Evaluate the effects of setting boundaries, Be proactive and not reactive, Envy is a self-perpetuating cycle, Initiate and push to set boundaries (let me know if I bump your nose), Your boundaries need to be visible to others and communicated to them in relationship.

Or I could talk about CDC online modules for healthy relationships, especially with teens.

Or marriage relationships with the John Gottman Institute, 7 Principles of Success in your marriage – better not go there today.

Such as with the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse that may clip-clop into your relationship – Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling.

Or, as, Mary Wright suggested to me, focus on the “divine nature” of pastor, elder, member relationships. All church relationships, woven together in a holy way. Since the theme of our program today, suggested by Ann Schwartz, is Healthy Boundaries, Healthy Leaders, Healthy Churches, I suggest to you, congregational leaders and ruling and teaching elders are “called” to model appropriate, healthy behavior in your relationships. Steve is talking today about relationships that may be outside the boundary of pastor, as in close friend relationships, and that may be problematic, so I don’t want to repeat that. In this session, we can ensure “No Relationship is a Waste of Time,” if we include the “divine elements” available to us. If we emulate God’s relationship with us.

That approach takes us to Romans 12, the Dos and Do Nots of Christian living:

Be devoted to brotherly love, honor one another, practice hospitality, be patient in affliction.

Don’t be proud or conceited, don’t repay evil for evil, don’t take revenge.

This approach also brings us to Matthew 22:39, Love your neighbor as yourself, the second Great Commandment.

And to the work of Lewis B. Smedes, a Reformed tradition theologian at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA. He writes, “A pastor or leader who keeps to the divine basics will earn respect and trust over the long haul, while the magnetic, smooth-talker fumbles his way to another church.

Relate to others with warmth but be reserved. He has many quotes on the website, Brainy Quotes.

Pre-test: What is your reaction to this title...where do you see it going?

Slide 3 – Smedes’ “Divine Basics” Start with Trust. Some Divine Elements, God is trustworthy, honest, reliable, holy, faithful, loving, and just.

Trust is defined as...

Slide 4 – After being “called” or duly elected by the membership, in some circumstances, members may think and/or say, “We don’t know you, nor do we trust you.”

That feeling you observe may lead you to think, “Did God call me to this church, or did I act impulsively?” “Was I called to pastoral work at all?”

These questions can be a blow to the church leader’s ego.

Slide 5 – A lack of trust is often the root of leadership problems. Trust is not automatic, there may be lingering feelings toward past clergy or leadership. Members don’t want to repeat or parallel an uncomfortable past. They may have been burned somehow, often with dishonesty.

Slide 6 – A.W. Tozer, a pastor, author, and mentor early in the 20th century, says that troubled members find hope in God. Can we be trusted to deliver new hope as well?

Slide 7 – Other divine elements of our relationships are Integrity and Faithfulness. Why can’t we be faithful and keep our promises, where our word is as good as God’s? Isn’t that what Jesus meant when he said our yes should be yes and our no, no? Church leaders must be faithful to their commitments, in ministry, in finances, in conversation, and with our family.

*I love what Lewis B. Smedes wrote, “Personal integrity in a pastor is an indispensable quality, yet it comes only with great struggle...dulling the

cutting edge of honesty is really very easy. Masks get comfortable very soon. Roles are learned terribly fast. Ministerial cosmetics go on quickly.”

Comments about Smedes’s quote?

Slide 8 – More divine elements of our relationships are Transparency and Empathy. People need to know that they matter, and that their pastor or church leader cares about what is going on in their lives. (I must say that Wade Halva, our pastor is incredible at remembering things we have told him – he asks and then remember names, dates, events in my life that I have forgotten) Aloofness will not get a pastor or church leader into the hearts of his people. It takes more than just understanding them, it takes empathy. Jesus is a great high priest because...

We know he cares...the same goes for us as leaders.

Learn to listen before talking. Listen in the fellowship hall and sanctuary before worship and in the narthex. Become aware of their families, jobs, personal lives, and burdens. By listening you build trust, and if the level of trust is high enough, any suggestions or support given will be well received.

Respect for the rights and integrity of other people strengthens transparency. Acknowledge the self-worth of others. That encourages transparency in others. People like to talk about themselves and their lives, if you listen!

Slide 9 – A final divine element of relationships today is Genuineness.

A.W. Tozer wrote about the disease of artificiality: Leaders who...

Speak with the bold authority of the Word. The bible portrays love, but it's also frank. Its authors are never rude or unkind, but they are honest and entirely sincere.

Genuineness requires...

Some members want their pastor to play the "higher than thou role," and put you on a pedestal. Sometimes it is safer to do that, than to disclose your struggles.

But, Research finds...

However, self-disclosure carries the risk of rejection and loss of control or influence over others. Make sure your self-disclosure appropriate.

Summary:

Every relationship we experience can be divine in one way or another. Demonstrating trust, integrity, faithfulness, transparency, empathy, and genuineness is never a waste of time, it's the right thing to do in the presence of God and another person. One of Tom Logan's Marion Medical Mission mantras is Ubuntu - "I am who I am because of **who we all are.**" Healthy relationships allow us to be all we can be.

Post Test

Thoughts, Comments, and Questions

I recommend *The Book of Joy*, The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu for another workshop by itself. It helps you understand yourself as you enter relationships with others.