

Welcome to the **The Seventh Annual** (Saturday April 24, 2010)
Minnesota Bible Lectureship

This year's theme:

Building Better Relationships

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: BOB TURNER is an instructor and Director of Extension Center Studies at the ***Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver.***

8:00 a.m. - Registration (Refreshments & Childcare will be provided.)

9:00 a.m. - Introduction, Prayer, and Song

9:15 a.m. - ***Building a Better Relationship with God***

- Bob Turner - Denver, CO

10:15 a.m. - ***Building a Better Relationship with Your Spouse***

- Ron Maynard - Mankato, MN

11:15 a.m. - ***Building Better Relationships with Other Generations***

- Baxter Exum - Madison, WI

Noon - Lunch

1:30 p.m. - ***Building Better Relationships with Our Own Children***

- Bob Turner - Denver, CO

2:30 p.m. - ***Building Better Relationships with Our Friends***

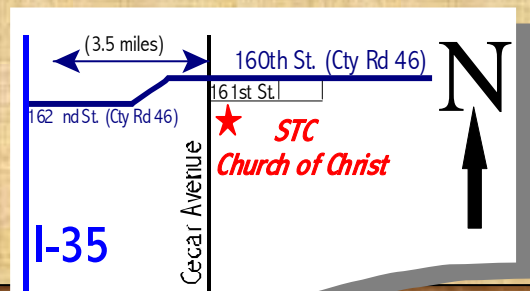
- Bill Trees - Sioux Falls, SD

3:30 p.m. - ***Building a Better Relationship with Our Congregation***

- Bob Turner - Denver, CO

- This lectureship is sponsored by the Owatonna Church of Christ and the South Twin Cities Church of Christ.
- It will be held in the **South Twin Cities Church of Christ** building near the intersection of County Road 46 & Cedar Ave in Lakeville.
- Though physically in Lakeville, the address is 16120 Cedar Avenue South - Rosemount, MN.

- For more info contact - Dan Mayfield (507) 451-7368
- Randy Martin (952) 469-9793





Bob Turner is married to Sheryl and they have been married for nearly 28 years. They have three children and three grandchildren. Bob graduated from the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver in 1993 and completed the Master's Program at Bear Valley in 2008. They have served as a part of the mission's team in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada for nearly 5 years and Bob served as the pulpit minister for the Greenbrier Church of Christ in Greenbrier, Arkansas for almost 11 years. In August of 2008 Bob began working with the Bear Valley Bible Institute, as an instructor, and in March, 2009 took the responsibilities as the Director of Extensions.

Building A Better Relationship With God

Introduction:

- A. I grew up in the home of a preacher. Other than times of living a worldly life, concerning spiritual matters, I have never really known anything other than being around Christians.
 - 1. I have seen times in the lives of my parents when they were strong in their faith and service to the Lord.
 - 2. I have also seen times when they struggled with decisions and feelings of being alone.
- B. After attending the Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver, I was so fired up with all the information that had been crammed into my head over three years of training, I could not wait to get out and share it with everyone.
 - 1. Sheryl and I moved to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada to work as a part of a mission's team.
 - 2. I will never forget the first six months.
 - a. I felt so empty. I did not know what to preach. I could not get motivated to study.
 - b. I could not find any purpose to what I was supposed to be doing.
 - c. I thought I had made a huge mistake and was looking for a way to come back home.
 - 3. As odd as it may sound, there have been times over the last 17 years I have questioned many areas of my faith and relationship to God.
 - a. There have been times I felt very close to God and strong in faith.
 - b. There have been times when I did not think my prayers went any higher than the ceiling.
- C. Maybe you have struggled with times like this in your own life.
 - 1. Times of feeling alone and as though God were nowhere around.
 - 2. Struggling with temptation, sin, or just an emptiness for purpose and direction in life.
 - 3. There are problems that arise in family, health, finances, job security, etc.
 - 4. How can we overcome those times in our life and build a better relationship with God?
- D. There are several lessons we can learn from the life of Joseph in the Old Testament.

Here we will relate the life of Joseph as pertains to the lesson.

Main Point: A better relationship with God begins by practicing the presence of God.

Key Text: Genesis 37-50

I. God is "everywhere"

- A. Joseph knew that God was not just located in Canaan where his family lived.
 - 1. He was also God in Egypt.
 - 2. He was God in prison.
 - 3. He was God on the throne.
- B. Often times we have a tendency of thinking God only exists within the four walls of the church building.
 - 1. We tend to view this as the sanctuary.
 - 2. We also think God is only present when we are all here. Mt. 18:20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."
 - 3. We almost begin to think God does not exist anywhere else.
- C. Consider what scripture teaches us about God's location.
 - 1. Solomon's prayer in the dedication of the temple in 1Kings 8:27.
 - 2. David's view of God's presence in Psalm 139:7-12.
 - 3. Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman in John 4:19-24.
 - 4. A better relationship with God begins with practicing the presence of God.

II. God sees "all"

- A. Joseph knew God was aware and could see everything taking place.
 - 1. He could see the affliction he was suffering.
 - 2. He could see the temptations he endured.
 - 3. He could see the future of the nation to preserve it.
- B. Isn't interesting to think about what we truly practice concerning what God sees.
 - 1. Are we aware that God sees our conduct on the job?
 - 2. Are we aware He sees the way we treat our spouse?
 - 3. Are we aware He sees how we treat and raise our children?
 - 4. Are we aware He sees how much time we give in study and prayer?
- C. Scripture teaches us much we should know about what God sees.
 - 1. Solomon's message in Proverbs 15:3 speaks volumes.
 - 2. God's message to Israel is profound in Jeremiah 23:23-24.
 - 3. The writer of the book of Hebrews speaks about God's vision in Hebrews 4:13.
- D. I remember seeing a video on Facebook once about a family getting up on Sunday morning and preparing to go to the worship assembly.
 - 1. The family was running late and nothing seemed to go right.
 - 2. The parents were fighting with each other and fussing at the kids trying to get them ready and make sure they looked and dressed just right.
 - 3. The entire trip to the building, they were continuing what began in the morning, barking at every other driver, still arguing with the kids.

4. Then, the minute they arrived at the church building, they stepped out of the car and began greeting everyone as though God were the blessing of everything and everyone in life. They talked about how their family was the model family for Christianity and the church.
 5. Does this sound familiar? I hope not, but I know from personal experience it has happened far too often.
 6. I often wonder what the children must have thought? What God must think?
 7. A better relationship with God begins with practicing the presence of God.
- III. God is "able"
- A. God's ability goes back to the very nature of His name.
 1. Elohim - Gen. 1 Elohim indicates strength, power, the one who is to be feared.
 2. YHWH - Gen. 2 YHWH is the personal name of God, very significant in respect to the unfolding events of Genesis 2.
 3. Elroi - Gen. 16 Elroi is the name given by Hagar to God. It means "God sees."
God saw her in her affliction and demonstrated His care for her and Ishmael.
 4. El-Shaddai - Gen. 17 El-Shaddai means God Almighty, but it is extremely key to the idea of what unfolds in the life of Abraham and the remainder of Genesis. This will be taken all the way down through the life of Joseph.
 - B. Joseph would have known the existence of God Almighty.
 1. God is going to change the name of Jacob to Israel in Genesis 35:11. He Will remind Jacob of who He is, El-Shaddai.
 2. He knew from a young age dreams meant something and that the interpretation of dreams belonged to God.
 3. He knew God had a purpose behind the dreams and events that unfolded in his life throughout the period in Egypt.
 4. He knew what his brothers meant for evil, but God meant for good.
 - C. We have to learn that our God is El-Shaddai, God Almighty and He is able.
 1. He is able make all grace abound to us: 2 Co. 9:8
 2. He is able to keep us from temptation beyond our ability: 1 Co. 10:13
 3. He is able to make all things work together for good: Rom. 8:28
 4. He is able to do above all we ask and think: Eph. 3:20

Conclusion:

- A. A better relationship with God begins by practicing the presence of God.
- B. Learning to practice the presence of God.
 1. Consider our approach to life.
 - a. Are there things we would say or do in front of our friends we would not say or do in front of the preacher or an elder?
 - b. When we are exceeding the speed limit or approaching a stop sign, if there is a policeman in sight, do we stop completely or slow down, but would not if the police were not around?

- c. When we do these things, we are showing more respect to a man than we do to God, because we fail to recognize God sees it all.
 - 2. Being a Christian is what you are in the dark.
 - a. When no one else can see or know, we remember God sees and God knows.
 - b. Our purpose and ambition is to please Him.
- C. As we all consider our life and how we can make application to the presence of God, learn to ask a simple question, would I do this if God were standing next to me?
 - 1. As you begin to build speed into traffic, how fast should I go?
 - 2. As you approach the stop sign, how completely should I stop?
 - 3. When you begin to think about the humor you want to express on the job, would you want to tell it in God's presence?
 - 4. When you think about how you conduct yourself on the job, your work ethic, are you working as though you were trying to serve God?
 - 5. Do we fulfill our marriage vows as though we really did make them in the presence of God and God is watching to see we fulfill them?
 - 6. Are we raising our children according to God's plan, as He would have us to raise them? Are we teaching them the priority of worship above a job, school or sporting activity, above recreation?
 - 7. Do we consider others are watching our behavior at sporting events when We are not pleased with a particular call made by the official? Have we ever thought in terms of God sitting next to us?
 - 8. Are we practicing the presence of God?
- D. There is also a positive side of this equation in our relationship with God.
 - 1. There is never a time when we are alone, when God is not there with us.
 - 2. There is no time when God does not see the struggles we face, the Temptations we endure, and the afflictions we encounter. He sees it all.
 - 3. We need to also remember our God is able to do exceeding, abundantly, beyond all we ask and think.
 - a. Let us not place limitations on God because we think we "can't" do it.
 - b. Also, we need to start thinking big!
- E. The impact of our involvement in these areas will change the influence the church has on the community and world we live in.
 - 1. I can't help but think of what we could do in our relationship with God When put the right perspective in place of who God is and who we are.
 - a. Just think, there is no reason to ever fear, because God is always with us.
 - b. There is no need to worry about difficulties we face, because God sees everything.
 - 2. It is also amazing to think about what we could do as the church in reaching out to the community with the good news of Christ if we were to realize what our God is able to do.
 - 3. When we practice the presence of God, it cannot help but build a better relationship with Him.



Ron Maynard has been a full-time evangelist since his graduation from Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver in 1972. During that time he worked for two years with the Crosstown church in Tulsa, OK, directing a large bus ministry and benevolent center outreach; 24 years with churches in Mankato, Owatonna, and South Twin Cities in Minnesota, also serving as an elder and deacon of education; and 13 years as a Fishers of Men instructor, equipping Christians in 14 states and three foreign countries to teach the gospel to their friends, neighbors, and relatives. He has made seven trips to Russia and one to Ukraine. In addition to an Associate Degree from Bear Valley, Ron holds a Bachelors degree in Family Life/Child

Development, a Masters degree in Adult and Family Education from the University of Minnesota at Mankato, and a Doctor of Ministry in Church Growth and Evangelism from Theological University of America. He taught in the Early Childhood Family Education program in Minnesota as a licensed parent educator. Ron has been married to Louise since 1963 and has three children and nine grandchildren. Ron can be reached at 1153 Aston Circle, Burnsville, MN 55337; E-mail: fomrlm@aol.com or Cell: 612-963-2808

Building a Better Relationship with Your Spouse 2010 Minnesota Bible Lectures By Ron Maynard

We will review important principles for building a better relationship with our spouses as we answer these three questions assigned with this topic:

- What are major roadblocks?
- How do we improve our communication?
- What are some habits of successful couples?

I. Introduction

- A. "Every successful journey begins with the end of the journey in view."
- B. Seeing our marriage as a journey will help us build a better relationship.
- C. How do we have joy in our journey together?

II. A major roadblock is not understanding God's view of marriage.

- A. Begin at the beginning by looking at God's origin of marriage. Each day God said, "It is good." On day six, He created man and woman and looked at all that He had made and said, "It is very good."

"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day." Genesis 1:31

There was just one thing that was not good—for man to be alone.

Genesis 2:18 *And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*

God created all the animals and instructed Adam to name them. Adam found none comparable to himself, and God created woman for man (Genesis 2:19-20).

B. Marriage was designed to bring glory to God.

I Peter 3:1-7 ¹ Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, ² when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. ³ Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- ⁴ rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. ⁵ For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. ⁷ Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Notice one motivation for the wife's submission is that her disobedient husband may be won to Christ. Her adornment is to be a gentle and quiet spirit that is precious in the sight of God.

The husband understands and gives honor to the wife as being heirs together of the grace of life.

Ephesians 5:27-28 ...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

Ultimately, all that we do in marriage is to please and glorify God and to help each other to go to heaven, to become joint heirs of the grace of life.

C. God's plan for marriage focuses on the spiritual instead of the physical.

Obviously, marriage is a physical relationship. We "become one flesh."

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

A major purpose of marriage is to produce children.

Genesis 1:28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

However, successful marriages are ones in which the husband and wife are on a spiritual journey together to become "joint heirs of the grace of life."

Do we view our spouses as a body with a spirit or a spirit with a body?

Think of a tent pitched next to a brick house. Which one do we see our spouse as being? II Cor. 5:1-7 *For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

Too often we focus on the tent, not on the “house not made with hands.”

Thinking of our spouses as spirits with a body rather than bodies with a spirit will help to solve problems and answer questions that plague most marriages:

- How shall we spend our money? This is the #1 conflict in marriage relationships. (Matthew 6:19-21 *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*)
- How do we deal with aging and the loss of physical strength and beauty?
- How shall we spend our time, e.g., a trip to Hawaii vs. a mission trip? (This is not to condemn trips to Hawaii!)

D. God views marriage as a sacred vow.

God has issued warnings about making vows, but He considers the marriage vows to be sacred and binding.

Romans 7:2 *For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.*

Matthew 19:6 *So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

A Christian woman, married over 50 years, made this point this way. She said the wedding is not about a young girl's dreams of a princess having the perfect wedding day. It is about vowing before God that your spouse will be the number one person in your life.

Think about what you vowed to do and be when you married. For some of you, this may be a memory challenge! Perhaps more of us need to renew our vows, whether we do it in a special ceremony as some do, or whether we just think about and talk about what we promised to do.

III. How do we improve our communication?

A. Spouses need to communicate with each other.

I Peter 3:7 *Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...*

- B. Understanding that leads to good communication recognizes that your spouse's personality was created by God and God doesn't make mistakes. Of course, all personality traits must be tempered by Christian principles.

There are all sorts of personality profiles, and many of you have taken them, perhaps in connection with your jobs. We do not have time for taking a personality inventory, but I think you can recognize you and your spouse in these descriptions. This profile may not be as scientific as some, but it is very practical. It was developed by Dr. Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent. Each personality type is designated by an animal.



LION

Strengths– Visionary, practical, productive, strong-willed, independent, decisive, leader



OTTER

Strengths– Outgoing, responsive, warm, friendly, talkative, enthusiastic, fun-loving



RETRIEVER

Strengths– Calm, easy-going, dependable, quiet, objective, diplomatic, caring, humorous



BEAVER

Strengths– Analytical, self-disciplined, industrious, organized, aesthetic, sacrificing

Often you'll find that people have a primary character type and a secondary type. Take a look at yourself and your spouse. For each of you, which one is the primary and which is the secondary? Some naturally go together and make for a wonderful set of strengths.

To illustrate each personality type, consider the parental task of putting the child's toy together at midnight on Christmas Eve. The lion takes charge, opens the box, dumps the parts on the floor,

and using the picture on the box, begins to put the toy together. The beaver pulls out the instructions, reads that the first step is to inventory all the parts, and immediately begins to do so. The golden retriever calmly observes and says, “Honey, you are doing such a good job of putting that together.” The otter says, “Hey, anybody ready for a cup of hot chocolate?”

How do we apply this to Christian marriages and communication?

First, recognize that you and your spouse were born with your personality. God made you that way. When you die, you will still have the same personality.

Second, when we grow as Christians, or even when we are trained by Christian parents, our personalities are tempered by Christian principles. We are “transformed by the renewing of our minds.”

Romans 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

The spouse with a lion personality, for example, may be a husband who wants to take charge and make decisions without taking into account what is best for the family. Ephesians 5:28 *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.*

Or a woman with a lion personality might have great difficulty in submitting to her husband. Ephesians 5:22-24 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Third, accept your spouse’s personality. Your job is not to change your spouse’s personality. We can encourage people to temper their personalities to bring them in line with Christian principles. We are told to rebuke and exhort others (II Tim. 4:2), but the only personality that we can really modify is our own.

Fourth, understanding your spouse’s personality allows you to better communicate with them. Understanding is a cornerstone of communication. Perhaps the best illustration of this is a common one, that of the lion husband whose golden retriever wife shares with him a problem she is having. The lion’s immediate response is to take charge and solve the problem. The golden retriever is hurt because she wanted sympathy and understanding.

There are two avenues of communication: giving and receiving. The giver speaks or acts in order to express a point of view. The receiver listens and watches to understand the giver’s message. Jesus pointed out many times the problem of communication failure.

Matthew 11:15 *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Matthew 13:13 *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

And James admonished in James 1:19-20: *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

IV. What are some habits of successful couples?

A. To answer the final question posed in my assignment for today, I interviewed four Christian couples whose marriage relationships I admire. Two of the couples have been married over 50 years, and each has two or three married children and six or more grandchildren. The other two couples have been married over 20 years, and each has two or three young children. All of them are very active in service to the Lord. They were not all comfortable with being chosen to comment on their marriages. As one said, “The reason our marriage flows smoothly is because we never think about what makes our marriage flow smoothly.”

B. One of the areas that each couple emphasized was communication. All of them set aside time for direct communication and planning. The two younger couples telephone each other several times a day. They have a scheduled date night that is separate from their social time with friends and children. They use this time to plan their schedules and calendars. Both of the younger couples spend time in conversation each evening after the children go to bed. One of the couples has a tradition of hot chocolate during this time. The two older couples sit down together at the beginning of the week to plan the week’s activities with each other, with their grandchildren and other extended family, and with the church. They discuss specifically their ministry in the church and the community, planning the outreach they will do and persons they will contact by phone or mail or have in their homes. One of the couples mentioned that they communicate a problem to each other “before it festers.” This helps them to keep “garden variety problems from getting blown out of proportion.” They advised, “Don’t suffer in silence. Nobody likes to live with a martyr.”

C. All the couples pointed out good habits they practice or have observed in others. These include:

- Weekend couple getaways several times during the year.
- Setting a tone in the family that communicates that the marriage is the primary family relationship, and that the family is not kid-centered.
- Actively plan special occasions for their extended family, e.g. birthday parties, anniversaries, camping trips. One of the older couples cited the wife’s parents who were “family oriented to a fault.” They went on to say that “this is much more important to us now than it was when we were younger and still is a very important part of all of their children’s families. Their grandchildren still carry on the camping tradition at Beaver Lake for two weeks during the last part of July each year. There will be approximately 55 people there this year.”
- Show respect for each other, always even-tempered in the presence of others, never “out each other or fuss in our presence.”
- Make time for long walks each evening.

- Have a set time for breakfast each Saturday.

D. Significant quotations from the four couples:

- “The number one thing women want is to be listened to by their spouse. The number one thing men want is to be respected by their spouse. Wives should not criticize their husbands in public, and husbands should not talk about their wives’ weight!”
- Principle for making plans together: “What you do is important to me. What I do is important to you. What we do is important to us.”
- “Take personal responsibility; don’t expect your spouse to make you happy. Reason: happiness comes from within. It is not the product of outward circumstances. Outward circumstances can affect it, but that is not the source, and it is unfair to expect someone else to make you happy.”
- “Never threaten your spouse with consequences. Don’t consider divorce as a solution to marital problems. When discussing solutions to problems, take divorce out of your vocabulary. Always be willing to start over.”
- “Take car trips together. Eliminate outside influences and build companionship. Marriage is 99% companionship and 1% sex. If you get the balance right, you will not know the difference. If you can survive and enjoy a three or four week car trip, you can survive a marriage.” It is probably obvious that this is a quote from one of the couples married 50+ years!
- “Unselfishness is a key. Brother [Wendell] Winkler really stressed that many people are “me-deep in self” and that this is the downfall in many marriages. (cf. Eph. 5:25)”
- “We feel that we have always relied on the Providence of God (Matt. 6:33; Luke 6:38). We have not always trusted the Lord as we should, but it is a key factor in our home. The Lord has always provided for our needs, and He has always brought people into our lives who had a powerful impact for good.”
- “It is impossible for two faithful Christians to divorce. It simply cannot happen.”

V. Conclusion

Following God’s admonition to husbands and wives at the beginning of I Peter 3, we find these words, addressed to the church in general, but certainly appropriate for building great marriage relationships:

I Peter 3:8-12 Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For “*He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.*” ¹¹ *Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.* ¹² *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*



Baxter Exum was born on May 25, 1972, and became a Christian at the age of 11. He married Keola Vosburgh in May 1993. They have two children, Silas (12) and Tabitha (9). Baxter graduated from Freed-Hardeman University in May 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Bible and a minor in Communication. He also holds a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership from Amridge University in Montgomery, Alabama. Upon graduation from Freed-Hardeman, Baxter began preaching for the Janesville (Wisconsin) congregation and served for seven years with that congregation. In April 2000, he and his family moved to

Madison, Wisconsin, and Baxter began preaching for the Four Lakes Church of Christ (www.fourlakescoc.org). Baxter currently serves as the Director of Beaver Creek Bible Camp and has served in that capacity for the past ten years. This summer's session (for ages 8-18) will be held June 27-July 3, at the Beaver Creek Reserve, ten miles east of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Baxter's favorite Bible verse is 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."

"Building Better Relationships with Other Generations"

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Baxter T. Exum

SEVENTH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BIBLE LECTURES

Rosemount, Minnesota

April 24, 2010

All of us here this morning know at least something about the challenges of growing older. In our own family, as of tomorrow, my wife and I will be blessed with knowing what it is like to be the parents of a teenager. Several months ago, our youngest asked me whether I was going to die soon. I gently took her in my arms and asked her why she was concerned about that, and she said, "Because you have grey in your beard!" And with that, I grew a few more! And then, as I was preparing for this morning's lesson, I suddenly realized that I have now lived on my own longer than I ever lived with my parents, and yet even though that is true, so much of it seems like it happened only yesterday. Even up until just a few years ago, my 80-something year old grandfather would ponder his age, but then he would always say, "But I don't feel old." Here he was in a wheelchair, unable to hear, unable to leave his apartment due to health concerns, and yet he did not "feel old." And so even if we are not regularly hit with the full force of what it really means to mature, we still understand, though, at least something about the challenges that are involved in growing older. One of those challenges is that as we mature, we start to realize that there are people younger than we are, and then, if we are wise, we start to understand that we face some serious challenges in communicating with

generations other than our own. We sometimes refer to this as the "generation gap," the idea that there is tension between people of different ages.

In our own nation, for example, we look around us and we discover several generations:

- The oldest among us are part of what is sometimes referred to as the "Greatest Generation," born between 1915 and the mid-1920's. These are those who grew up in the Great Depression and fought in World War II. Those in the Greatest Generation are now between the ages of 85 and 95.
- We then see what is commonly referred to as the "Silent Generation," those who were born from around 1925 to 1945—those now between the ages of 65 and 85—too young to have fought in the war, but old enough to have fathers who served in the war, some of whom still remember the Great Depression from when they were very young.
- We then see those who are now known as the Baby Boomers, those who were born from roughly 1946 through the mid 1960's, those who are now roughly between the ages of 45 and 64, many of whom have just started to retire.
- We then see what is sometimes referred to as Generation X, those who were born from around the mid 1960's through 1981, those who are roughly between the ages of 29 and 45.
- We then run into what is commonly referred to as Generation Y, those who were born from around the mid to late 1970's to the early 1990's, generally speaking, the children of the Baby Boomers—roughly between the ages of 19 and 34.
- Then we come to Generation Z, those who were born from the early 1990's to the late 2000's, those who are just a few years old up to those who are in their late teens.
- And then right here at the end, we have those who were born after the financial crisis in 2008, and those who will be born through roughly 2025. For now, the name Generation Alpha has been proposed, and those in this generation are obviously 2 years old at the oldest right now.

But the point of this brief summary is to emphasize that we are now living among people of at least seven different generations! And as you can imagine, there is a tremendous potential for conflict among these generations. And what has come to be known as the "Generation Gap" continues.

In view of the potential for misunderstanding, people have tried dealing with the generation gap in many different ways. Perhaps some of you are familiar with the "Mindset List" that has been compiled by two professors at

Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin, for several years now. Each fall, mindful that their fellow professors may have a hard time connecting with the incoming freshman class, these two professors make a list—a list of things for their fellow “old guy” professors to keep in mind as they teach the incoming class of college freshmen. In the most recent list, for example, they start with a reminder,

If the entering college class of 2013 had been more alert back in 1991 when most of them were born, they would now be experiencing a severe case of déjà vu. The headlines that year railed about government interventions, bailouts, bad loans, unemployment and greater regulation of the finance industry. *The Tonight Show* changed hosts for the first time in decades, and the nation asked “was Iraq worth a war?” (McBride & Nief, 2009)

Very interesting! They point out that most of those in this past fall’s freshman class were born in 1991.

- For these students, Pan American Airways, Michael Landon, Dr. Seuss, Miles Davis, and Gene Roddenberry have always been dead.
- Dan Rostenkowski, Jack Kevorkian, and Mike Tyson have always been felons.
- The Green Giant has always been Shrek, not the big guy picking vegetables.
- They have never used a card catalog to find a book.
- They have been preparing for the arrival of HDTV all their lives.
- They have never had to “shake down” an oral thermometer.
- State abbreviations in addresses have never had periods.
- McDonald’s has always been serving Happy Meals in China.
- Britney Spears has always been heard on classic rock stations.
- Someone has always been asking: “Was Iraq worth a war?”
- Agent Starling has always feared the Silence of the Lambs.
- There has always been a computer in the Oval Office.

I don’t know about you, but just thinking about some of these things started making me feel just a little bit old! And so perhaps we struggle when it comes to understanding a generation other than our own. But the Mindset List, nevertheless, has been one very valuable tool that has allowed those of us in older generations to at least try to relate to the latest generation that is younger than our own.

Others have taken the generation gap and have tried to use it to their advantage. We know that commercials are often custom tailored to certain age groups. Several years ago I was watching the 5:30 evening news on one of the major networks, and it suddenly hit me that only old people watch the evening news, and here I was watching the evening news. And I

say that only old people watch the evening news because of the commercials. Notice what they advertise. If you turn on one of the three major networks at 5:30 p.m., you will find ads for pretty much every kind of pharmaceutical known to mankind, from all of the various cures for hair loss all the way to drugs for diabetes and high blood pressure, to everything in between. And so advertisers are obviously conscious of their audience, and the audience is often defined by age.

Several weeks ago, I noticed in Madison that several companies had come together to sponsor what they labeled as “Boomer Fest.” It was basically a conference, a big party, for Baby Boomers. They had all kinds of guest speakers—various financial planners, and relationship coaches, and advice for starting a small business, they emphasized that the over-40 crowd is “aging with attitude,” and they were all upbeat about how great it is to be a Baby Boomer, and then I flipped the page and noticed their biggest sponsor, “Brought to you by Gunderson Funeral and Cremation Care”! Ouch! And yet advertisers understand the value of advertising to a particular age group.

In the church, some have tried to take advantage of the generation gap by keeping the generations separate. And so we have senior Bible studies during the week, we have youth activities for the kids, and then during the Bible class hour most of the classes are also divided by age. And certainly there is a value to learning with people of the same age, but there is also a certain danger if we never come together. There is potential for conflict.

And so with that, we come to this morning’s lesson, “Building Better Relationships with Other Generations,” and since this is a “Bible Lectureship,” we go to the Bible for answers. Certainly it would have been very easy for us to think up five or six ways of overcoming the generation gap—we could have even made each of the main points start with the letter “P,” or something. But instead of coming up with our own outline, I would invite you to turn with me to a rather short but powerful passage that was written by the apostle Paul to a young preacher who was serving in the ancient city of Ephesus. I am referring to 1 Timothy 5:1-2. Sometimes the Lord’s church is pictured in the Scriptures as a body, or a building, or a kingdom, or a vine, or a flock, or a temple, or a priesthood, or even as a holy nation, but this morning we remind ourselves that the Lord’s church is also pictured as a family. And as the family of God, the Bible has something to say about how we interact with one another—especially when it comes to those in generations other than our own.

It is interesting that the Bible does not teach that we are to treat everybody the same. And the reason is: Just as we do, God also recognizes that there are differences between the generations. God knows what it means to have a generation gap. God knows that those who are older may start getting nervous when those who are younger start coming in and taking on positions of leadership. And, as One who taught the elders in the temple at the age of

12, God also knows that those who are older do not always appreciate the wisdom of those who are young. And so as we look at this very brief passage, I would simply point out that all of us in this room are covered by the words of Paul to the young preacher Timothy. If I were to ask you to raise your right hand if you know someone OLDER than you in the church, and if I were to ask you to raise your left hand if you know someone YOUNGER than you in the church, I would imagine that just about all of us would have both of our hands raised. Everyone in the church is either older or younger than we are. This passage, then, is for all of us, and it is extremely simple. We do not need to figure out whether someone is in Generation X, or the Greatest Generation, or Generation Alpha, or whatever, but we simply need to know whether they are older or younger than we are. With that in mind, please look with me at 1 Timothy 5:1-2...

¹ Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ² the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

What a simple passage! As we focus our thoughts on these two verses, I would like to divide this lesson into two parts.

- I. First of all, I would like for us to consider the fact that WE ARE TO APPEAL TO THOSE WHO ARE OLDER THAN WE ARE AS IF THEY WERE OUR PARENTS.

As God's people, we are a family, and as we all know, families can have a little friction from time to time. Paul is not saying that we need to ignore our differences, that we need to sweep things under the carpet, but what he is saying is that we need to treat those who are older than we are with respect—even when we disagree. Sometimes, those who are older than we are will have strong opinions, and sometimes those opinions will be wrong. And so, in verse 1, Paul reminds Timothy that he is not to “*sharply rebuke*” an older man. A sharp rebuke is a rebuke that is done in anger. The word itself is only used here in the New Testament, and it literally refers to “striking out” at someone with our words. And so we are talking about harsh words spoken with a critical spirit, a correction spoken violently with contempt or disgust, a verbal punch. As a younger man, perhaps Timothy would have been tempted to lash out, to lose his patience with the older members of the congregation.

But in contrast to a sharp rebuke, Paul tells us to “*appeal*” to someone who is older “*as a father.*” We are to appeal to the older women “*as mothers.*” We are to “*appeal*” to them; that is, we are to call them to our side, and we are to very gently work it out together. Perhaps we could say that we are to ask instead of tell. We are to make a case and plead with that older member as if he were our father. What an interesting concept! Nearly

every culture around the world promotes at least some level of respect towards those who are older, but especially towards our parents.

And so when it comes to dealing with differences between ourselves and an older generation, we are to remember that those who are older often have more experience and more wisdom in dealing with life. This does not mean that they are always right. They are not. We can confront when necessary, but we are to do it as if we had to gently correct our own parents, realizing that they have the benefit of already having been where we are now. Mark Twain summarized the generation gap pretty well when he said, "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years." And like Mark Twain, I can safely say that I was a lot smarter as a preacher when I was 19 than I am now. When we are young, we have the tendency to be strong and perhaps even harsh, but true wisdom comes over time.

Timothy, therefore, needed a reminder: Those who are older are not to be ignored, but they are to be honored, and we are to relate to them with the utmost of respect. Or, as Paul would go on to say in Ephesians 6:2, *"HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise)."* Treat the older members of the congregation with the same respect that we would have toward our own parents.

As the Bible says in Proverbs 16:31, *"A gray head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness."* As Job said in Job 12:12, *"Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding."* And as the Bible says in Leviticus 19:32, *"You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD."*

And for those of us who are younger, let us realize that respect is what the older generation really wants. They do not want to hold us back, they do not want to dampen our enthusiasm, but they do want to be respected. They want to be valued. They want to be consulted. They want to contribute. As the elderly Psalmist wrote in Psalm 71, *"Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails.... O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come"* (Psalm 71:9, 17-18).

As I was preparing this morning's lesson, I made just a short survey for the members of the Four Lakes congregation in Madison. The survey had two places to complete a sentence: 1.) I wish that those who are OLDER than me at this congregation would..., and 2.) I wish that those who are YOUNGER than me at this congregation would.... What do the older members of the congregation really want out of those who are younger?

One older member wanted those who were younger, "...to know they can come to me if they are struggling with something and to know I will listen and help them in any way I can, since I've probably experienced some of the things that they might be going through." Another older member wanted those who were younger to, "...bring their kids to Bible class whenever possible and be more involved in the church activities—especially when it comes to teaching and helping the elderly." Someone else wished that the young would "...study and memorize Scripture; watch out for the elderly—no running near those of us who are lucky to be at church services. I wish that the younger would put God first in their lives." A Christian woman in her 70's wished that the younger would, "...step up and do more of the work that needs to be done—things that will make sure that a true church will be here in the future. Prepare to be strong leaders. A lot of sacrifice was made to establish the Four Lakes congregation—do not let it be in vain." Someone else wished that the younger would, "...ask more questions."

If I could summarize: Those who are older want to be included, they want the church to be strong in the future, and they are looking for the respect of those who are younger. Those of us who are younger, therefore (as Paul says), are to appeal to those who are older as if they were our own parents. We are to treat them with respect.

- II. There is a second aspect to these two verses in 1 Timothy 5, and that is, WE ARE TO APPEAL TO THOSE WHO ARE YOUNGER AS IF THEY WERE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

And so we shift our thinking away from how to interact with those who are older than we are to how we interact with those who are younger than we are. And again, as older people, it is tempting for us to sometimes be suspicious of the younger generations. Perhaps some who are older have the potential to be overly critical of those who are younger, and we know that this attitude has been around for many years. Think, for example, about one very influential professor from the secular world. This is what he said, "Youth today love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should work. Young people do not stand up any longer when adults enter the room. They contradict their parents, talk too much in company, guzzle their food, lay their legs on the table, and tyrannize their elders." That quote, of course, comes from Socrates, a man who was born nearly 500 years before the time of Christ! And so it seems that the generation gap between the old and the young has been around for a long, long time.

But consider how important it is for the older to patiently teach those who are younger. Think, for example, about all of the decisions that are usually made in that decade after a child turns sixteen. Here in our culture, during those ten years a child will make the transition from living at home to being

a fully functioning member of society. During those ten years, a child will decide whether to go to college and graduate school. During those ten years, a child will make a career decision. During those ten years, a child will often fall in love and will decide whether to get married. During those ten years, many will start to bring children of their own into this world. Many will decide whether they will obey the gospel. In fact, many of the decisions that will affect the rest of their lives will be made in that one decade, starting at the age of sixteen. But on top of this tremendous pressure, we realize that this is the time of life when we are perhaps least prepared to make some of these huge and life-changing decisions. During those ten years, therefore, it would be so helpful for children to have some Christian adults to look up to for advice and correction.

And so we go back to 1 Timothy 5:1-2, and we find that Timothy (even as a rather young man) is to appeal to those who are younger *"as brothers."* Notice: He is not to look down on them as if they were children. This is not a matter of Timothy looking down his nose and shaking his finger at people, but just as with those who are older, Timothy is to *"appeal"* to those who are younger. Literally, he is to call them to his side. He is to perhaps put his arm around them, and stand with them, and make a reasoned appeal. He is to use the same tone and attitude as he did with those who were older, but now he is speaking with those who are younger, and he is to approach them as brothers and sisters.

And didn't Jesus tell us how to handle conflict between brothers? In Matthew 18:15, Jesus said that, *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."* That is how I would like to be treated by the older members of my congregation. I hope that they would not all go out and have a good laugh at my expense, but I hope that they would pull me aside and explain to me the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26). The Golden Rule then tells us that if that's how we want to be treated, then we should go out and treat those who are younger than we are in the same way. Take them out for breakfast. Have them over for dinner. Value their opinion. Include them in the ministry of the congregation. Or, as Paul said, treat them as brothers and sisters, and when they need to be corrected, do it in the form of an *"appeal."*

We should notice a little bonus instruction (in verse 2) concerning the Christian sisters. Paul goes above and beyond the other instructions and tells us to appeal to the younger Christian sisters *"in all purity."* Do we understand the warning here? Do we understand the danger? Do we understand the opposite of *"purity"*? I hope we understand here that sexual sin (even within the church) is not new, and so Paul says that we are to behave with *"purity."* As Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*

So, with these comments in mind, how do those of us who are older try to bridge the generation gap with those who are younger? How do we interact with those who are younger than we are in a brotherly way? I have a few very practical suggestions:

For one, I have added an assignment to the premarital discussion worksheet that we go through with young couples who are preparing for marriage. You can download the whole premarital discussion guide from our website (on the [Resources](http://fourlakescoc.org/Resources/premaritaldiscussionguide.pdf) Page: <http://fourlakescoc.org/Resources/premaritaldiscussionguide.pdf>), but the very last question comes in the form of an assignment: Ask someone whose marriage you admire for any wisdom or advice that they may have for you. Specifically, try to ask them, "What do you wish someone had told you before you got married?" And I know that is a small and perhaps simple assignment, but I believe it gives at least one more opportunity for those who are older to "*appeal*" to those who are younger.

Secondly, I might suggest the possibility of something that is done at the Henderson congregation in Henderson, Tennessee. They are in a unique position, being right next door to the campus of Freed-Hardeman University, but it is a program that perhaps some of us could try to get started here in the upper Midwest. At the beginning of each school year, the church would have each college student put his or her name in a hat, and then the older couples at the congregation would pull out several names, and they would "adopt" those students for the rest of the school year. And especially for those of us who were hundreds of miles away from home, it was so nice to be able to go to those host families not only for food and the occasional load of laundry, but also for advice, as it was needed. It allowed those who were older to "*appeal*" to those of us who were younger. We do not have such a formal program down in Madison, but I know that we personally feel as if we have an "adopted" grandmother, and there have also been times when we have "adopted" some of the college students and the young adults.

As I see it, a lot of this also gets back to respect. Those who are older are also to respect those who are younger—to take them seriously and to give them advice as needed. Going back to that survey, when I asked those who were younger what they really wanted from those who were older, I was pleasantly surprised by some of those answers. From one Christian woman in her 40's, "I want those who are older than me to keep encouraging me and to keep being a role model for me to look up to when I need some guidance. Also, to be there to listen when I'm having struggles and to guide me to make the right decisions. And to still be my friend if I'm not always perfect and make a mistake." From another 40-something Christian woman, "I wish that the older members of the congregation would let me know when they need something, to teach me to be a better Christian wife, mother, friend, daughter, and disciple." From someone in their 60's, "I wish those who were older than me would let me help them and to continue to pass on

their wisdom and example." From a Christian woman in her 30's, "I wish those who are older than me would make the time to teach in formal and informal ways. Do a buddy system by directly showing younger Christians how to serve the church with hospitality, giving, teaching, and preparing for classes, cleaning, and so on." From one of our teenagers, "I wish that people who are older than me in the church would realize that I'm smarter than I come off as." From another teen, "I wish that people who are older than me at church would listen to my opinions."

In other words, it seems that those who are younger are looking for the older generations to pull them aside and to appeal to them, to treat them as brothers and sisters.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on building better relationships between different generations, I would like for us to remember the very last verse of the entire Old Testament. God would be sending a prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, and that prophet would *"...restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers"* (Malachi 4:6). Apparently, the Lord's forerunner would start bringing the older and the younger together through a common interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. The offer of salvation through Jesus would appeal to both the old and the young, and the generation gap would start to close as all ages came together at the foot of the cross. And so in the church, the wisdom of the older comes together with the energy and enthusiasm of the younger. We close the generation gap by treating the older with respect and by treating the younger as brothers and sisters. May God help us to treat each other as we would like to be treated...

Works Cited

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Bob Turner is married to Sheryl and they have been married for nearly 28 years. They have three children and three grandchildren. Bob graduated from the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver in 1993 and completed the Master's Program at Bear Valley in 2008. They have served as a part of the mission's team in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada for nearly 5 years and Bob served as the pulpit minister for the Greenbrier Church of Christ in Greenbrier, Arkansas for almost 11 years. In August of 2008 Bob began working with the Bear Valley Bible Institute, as an instructor, and in March, 2009 took the responsibilities as the Director of Extensions.

Building Better Relationships With Our Own Children

Introduction:

- A. Sheryl and I have 3 children, all grown and married. I am also excited to say we have three grandchildren. The years of parenting and now in the role as grandparents has taught us many lessons, both good and bad.
 - 1. Recently we were discussing the idea of building better relationships with our children over breakfast. She laughed and said, well once you get past the fact that when they turn 16 you can't give them up for adoption, you start trying to find ways to build on those relationships.
 - 2. We also enjoy talking about the changes they have been and put us through.
- B. I am sure all of you have similar areas you could share about your children and/or grandchildren.
- C. As we look around the world we live in, it pretty clear there are serious problems concerning the relationships between parents and children.
 - 1. Dec. 1, 1997 in Paducah, Kentucky, at a local high school, students were shot, several of which died and others critically wounded, while they were praying before school.
 - 2. March 24, 1998 in Jonesboro, Arkansas, four children and one adult died At the hands of an 11 and 14 year old who shot them.
 - 3. April 20, 1999 at the Columbine High School, south of Denver, 2 young men took the lives of 12 students and 1 teacher, injuring 24 others, before taking their own lives.
 - 4. April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech, a young man took the lives of 32 fellow students and professors and injured 25 more, before taking his own life.
 - 5. These are only a few we are most familiar with in our history.
 - 6. Consider the following:
 - a. There have been 90 school related shootings since 1966.
 - b. There have been 5 school related shootings this year.
 - c. A common profile among most of these incidents involved young men who came from broken homes.
- D. It is depressing to think about "One day in the lives of American Children." (see end)
 - 1. It is incredible to consider just how far from God the families in our

- country have gone.
- 2. All of this information would be extremely depressing if it were not for the fact it can be changed and we can make a difference.
- 3. This difference begins by building better relationships with our own children.
- E. Several areas to remember about parenting:
 - 1. No task is more difficult, yet so rewarding.
 - 2. There is no such thing as "perfect" parents.
 - 3. God's plan is the best for becoming better parents.
 - 4. Need to devote our lives to the God given task.

Main Point: Time in education and edification is an investment to better relationships.

Key Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-8

I. Time to Educate

- A. Consider the amount of time and money we spend training our children to provide physically and monetarily for a family versus the time and money to train them spiritually.
 - 1. Elementary, High School, University, Post-graduate training
7 hours a day, 180 days a year, 18 years = 22,680 hours
 - 2. If we begin them in Bible class and worship from the time they are born
4 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, 26 years = 5,408 hours
- B. Scripture teaches us of the need to take the time to educate our children: Dt. 6:4-8
 - 1. Notice how the text specifies several areas.
 - 2. The bottom line is we need to keep it before our children every minute of every day for their entire life.
- C. The battle we are fighting is great. Consider the emphasis in Paul's writings.
 - 1. Eph. 6:10-18 Christians are to put on the armor of God for spiritual battle.
 - 2. 1 Tim. 6:12 Timothy was instructed to "fight the good fight of faith."
 - 3. Many other passages emphasize similar teaching.
- D. We need to educate our children in several areas:
 - 1. Spiritual matters - relationship with God
 - 2. Family matters - relationship with husband, wives, as parents, children
 - 3. Worldly matters - relationships with those outside of Christ (job, neighbor, community)

II. Time to Edify

- A. Edifying is about building up our children.
- B. Scripture is very explicit about the need for the church to build up one another.
 - 1. Paul instructed the church at Thessalonica to "encourage one another and build up one another, just as they were doing," 1 Th. 5:11
 - 2. The church was designed to bring about growth and part of the equation for growing, as God intended, involved edification. Notice Eph. 4:11-16. If the church is ever going to function properly, it needs to be built up.
 - 3. If we recognize the need to be involved in edifying one another within the church, does it not make sense that it should begin in the home?

- C. Ways we can build up our children:
1. Love your children.
 - a. They need to hear you tell them you love them and why you love them.
 - b. They need to hear you tell them you are proud of them and why.
 2. Encourage them in their activities and accomplishments. Find some avenue to let them know they did a good job and they are special.
 3. Provide them with the tools needed to do what they want to do.
 - a. Helping them is not doing the job for them.
 - b. Watching over them and giving them the tools they need will help them achieve success.
 4. Be an example for them. The confidence they see in you and the way you conduct yourself will provide them with the foundation for their own confidence and security.
 4. Never discipline or punish publicly. Correction should be done privately. We find this example in scripture. Mt. 18:15, Acts 18:26
 6. Pray for them and let them hear us pray for them by name.
 - a. When our children were in school we would not leave the house in the mornings without first praying together. Sometimes they would lead the prayer, but I tried to often make sure I led the prayer and wanted them to hear me praying for them by name. It was even more interesting to see their friends when they would sleep over.
 - b. If you want to build up your children, pray for them.
 7. Children need to know home is a refuge, a safe haven, where they are accepted and they can be themselves.
 - a. Your home needs to be the place where they want to bring their friends and their friends will be welcome.
 - b. Your home needs to be the place where they know they can always return, no matter what happens in their life. They will make mistakes and the way we handle those mistakes as parents makes the difference in the future of our children and their families.

Conclusion:

- A. Story of the successful lawyer whose father gave him a box for Christmas with a note. This year son, I am going to give you one hour everyday.
1. He went on to say his father not only kept that promise, but renewed every year.
 2. Then, he said this, "I am the result of his time."
- B. Take time to apply the 10-10-10 Principle with a twist.
1. Take 10 minutes each day to pray for and with your children.
 - a. All of my children are married to Christians. I have been told I am lucky.
 - b. I prayed for over 20 years they would marry Christians.
 2. Take 10 minutes each day to pay attention to your children.
 - a. We get so busy we fail to listen to what they are saying to us.

- b. We too often want our children to listen to us.
 - 3. Take 10 minutes each day to play with your children.
 - a. Do something fun, something your children consider fun and want to do.
 - b. You will probably discover you enjoy it as well and spend more than 10 minutes.
- C. Think about the impact of the time we give to our children.
 - 1. Our homes will be better, stronger, and in keeping with what God designed.
 - 2. Our communities will be better.
 - 3. Think about how much better the influence of the church will be in our communities and the world in general.
- D. Time in education and edification is an investment to better relationships.

A Day in the Life of America's Children

Each Day in America:

- 5 Children or teens commit suicide.
- 9 Children or teens are homicide victims.
- 34 Children or teens die from accidents.
- 180 Children are arrested for violent crimes.
- 376 Children are arrested for drug abuse.
- 1,329 Babies are born to teen mothers.
- 2,319 Babies are born to mothers who are not high school graduates.
- 2,861 High school students drop out.*
- 4,248 Children are arrested.
- 7,883 Children are reported abused or neglected.
- 17,297 Public school students are suspended.*

*based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each)

From *The State of Children in America's Union: A 2002 Action Guide to Leave No Child Behind* published by the Children's Defense Fund.

The combined annual cost to American society of teen pregnancy, underage alcohol use and illegal drug abuse exceeds \$200 billion.**



Bill Trees, currently from Sioux Falls, SD has been a Christian for over 35 years. He's been involved in teaching and preaching in many churches of Christ throughout Iowa and South Dakota, serving seven years as a full-time preacher. Bill has a broad base of experience from police officer to truck driver to bus driver but his favorite passion is teaching about Christ and His church. Bill is married, has two children, and is "Papa" to four terrific grandchildren. He enjoys several hobbies, including singing barbershop, building and flying model airplanes, and hunting.

Building Better Relationships With Our Friends

The immediate implication is that we have friends! God has blessed us in many ways, and certainly one such blessing is having a friend or two. Perhaps before we attempt to identify how better relationships with a friend might evolve, we should briefly examine Scripture which alludes to “friend(s)”. There are many, but for the sake of contrast, let us examine two passages:

Matthew 26:47-50 “And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘**Friend**, why have you come?’ ”

This seems puzzling. Why would Jesus call Judas, His betrayer, “friend”? And, moreover, why would Judas, certainly a friend of Jesus, betray Him? Is Jesus using the word “friend” satirically? Does Judas, in his heart, really consider himself no longer a “friend” of Jesus?

2 Chronicles 20:22 “Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your **friend** forever?”

James 2:23 “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,’ And he was called the **friend** of God.”

These two passages (cross-referenced as one) seem to be rather straight forward in that God, who loves everyone (John 3:16), found a friend in Abraham. How did this happen? Simple; God and Abraham wanted the same things. Complex; because Abraham did not know the outcome of what God wanted until later. Was Abraham a friend of God always, or only when he had completed what God wanted done? Was God a friend of Abraham always, or only when Abraham was being absolutely obedient?

We may not be able to answer all these questions, but merely reflecting on them points out the extremes involved in a friendship; simplicity and complexity. Our motivation to build better relationships with our friends oscillates between these extremes.

Motivation

— Why would we want to build better relationships with our friends? There is only one reason I can think of; love. If love is the root of building better relationships with our friends, then we should take an objective look at the source and nature of love.

1 John 4:8 “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

The source of love is God.

Knowing this, one might think that a person is born knowing how to love and how to receive love, but Scripture teaches this is not so. Galatians 5:22 tells us that love is a “fruit of the Spirit”. There are numerous other Scriptural references that describe objective characteristics of love which one needs to know and understand in order to give love (1 Cor. 13:1-8a). Therefore, love must be taught! The product of this teaching, then, is what we would hope would be used as we attempt to build better relationships with our friends.

There is something else that needs to be understood about the nature of love.

Mark 12:30-31 “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Notice the order of things in verse 31; we are to love others as we love ourselves. Therefore, we **MUST** know and understand how to love ourselves in order that we may be obedient to the commandment to love our neighbor. We must understand how to build better relationships with ourselves before we can build better relationships with our friends! This brings us to the idea of understanding a very important quality of love – **OBEDIENCE**.

John 14:15 “If you love Me, obey My commandments.”

Matthew 28:18-20 “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

We can see how our Father put things in order concerning love, its source, nature, and use. God is love, therefore, love teaches. Instruction (in love) produces wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 4:1-7). Wisdom produces obedience. Obedience teaches love. Obedience also builds a beautifully better relationship between ourselves and God. Only now, with a clear conscience based on an obedient and loving relationship with our Savior, can we use the qualities of love effectively to build better relationships with our friends.

Motivation to build better relationships with our friends is found in our desire to be obedient to our Savior based on a correct understanding of His love for us and how He expects us to use His love to benefit others.

Reward

Recently I received the spring 2010 issue (pamphlet) “Discoveries” from Sanford Medical Center, one of the larger hospitals in our community. The first article was entitled, “5 Things You Can Do Today To Get Happier !”

(1) “Invest In Your Health” “Health is a prerequisite to happiness. In other words, you can’t be happy if you’re unhealthy. Eating wisely and moving naturally are the best way to get fit.”
(2) “Create Quality Friendships” “When it comes to a social network, quality is more important than quantity. Having two good friends who care about you is more important than a huge network. We often forget that friends rarely come on their own accord; they require effort, time, and nurturing.”

The other three articles were: (3) Explore Your Religion (4) Spend More Time With Your Hobby (5) If You’re Unhappy, Move

God rewards those who are obedient to Him. One of the ways He rewards obedient servants is with friends. We might think of these rewards as “blessings”, and they are given whether we are building better relationships with friends in the world or with friends who are Christians. Christians have friends in the world; this is not at all uncommon! As we attempt to build better relationships with worldly friends, we are, in effect, being obedient to our Father’s commands to “teach and baptize” IF that is in our mind and heart. Therefore, as Christians, we are a person of single mindedness and stable in all our ways (James 1:8). In other words, we use the tools of righteousness whether bettering relationships with worldly friends or Christian friends.

This rules out certain kinds of manipulative influence in building better relationships; the only thing important to us is a better relationship with our friend.

Acts 8:18 “And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,...”

Proverbs 19:6 “Many entreat the favor of the nobility, And every man is a friend to one who gives gifts.”

Proverbs 27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

These preceding verses make good points! Gifts, money, and favors are not used to build better relationships (because they don’t); they are, sometimes, unsolicited reciprocations of invested time, effort, and loving favor involved in, and necessary for, a better relationship with a friend; friends do things for each other because of love’s spontaneity.

Sometimes, we may say or do something that hurts a friendship. Our friend, with whom we are trying to build a better relationship, is wounded. However, because our friendship is unquestioned, faithful, and being maintained and strengthened, even the wounds a friend might suffer or inflict are less than the wounds of one who intends to be deceitful at the beginning and uses friendship as a feign. Perhaps this was the intention of Judas who kissed Jesus. Being persistent in building, repairing, and maintaining relationships with friends does have its rewards. (Luke 11:5-10)

Are We Willing To Make The Sacrifice?

Luke 6:27-38

Here in these verses are the rules of Kingdom life (Christian ethics, if you will). I can think of no better summation to building better relationships with friends than to examine this section of Scripture.

Love (v.27) We have discussed the importance of love, but perhaps not in the context of loving enemies and doing good even to those who hate us. We must remember John 3:16; “For God so loved the world.....” and Romans 5:10; “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son....” This kind of love is needed not only to establish friendships, but also to maintain friendships since friends do disappoint us at times. Maintaining a friendship is, in effect, building a better relationship.

Bless(v.28) God is asking us not to hold a grudge against someone, even a friend. Did Jesus do such against Judas? Jesus was spitefully used by Judas.

Pray(v.28) Since Jesus had no sin, He would only have forgiven Judas and prayed for him.

Handling Disappointment (v.29-30) Love simply causes us to resist doing anything in return that would be harmful.

The Golden Rule (v.31) As it reads here, this almost seems passive; in other words, wait and see what the other person does first, then perhaps we will do something equally as good for them. If we are going to build something, passive does not get the job done. Action (active) builds better relationships with our friends. Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. This does not mean they are obligated! A friend has no obligation to a friend; for if we make a friend feel obligated in our building a better relationship, we have failed.

Mercy (v.36) Mercy is sometimes defined as “not getting what we deserve”. Mercy is a critical component of building a better relationship with friends. I can think of no better example than that found in Psalm 51. David pleads with God to forgive him for adultery and murder. David is a child of God, and also a friend. God builds a better relationship with David through His extension of mercy toward David.

Judge not, Condemn not (v.37) There is judgment all Christians must make (John 7:24). This is, however, judging between right and wrong before God. Here, God is asking us not to judge the eternal soul of anyone, nor condemn the eternal soul of anyone. This can be avoided by simply **forgiving** which is different from mercy in that we must try to completely forget that which we are compelled to forgive.

Act on these principles (v.38) If friends are a blessing from God, then there are rewards to be harvested from building better relationships with those whom God has blessed us with.

Conclusion:

Luke 6:38b “For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Because we love God, and want to please Him by our obedient action, we are motivated to seek and do His will. In return, God has provided blessings and rewards for our sacrifices if we are willing to make those sacrifices. Mostly, we tend to think of these blessings and rewards in that part of eternity we know as heaven. As we work to build better relationships with our friends, God has extended a **promise** to us; this promise rewards us both here and now AND there and then. God has our welfare in mind, He wants to see us happy and enjoying life in His Kingdom, so He has promised us that if we will just try; if we will put forth the effort; if we will make the sacrifices needed to build better relationships with our friends, then He will make certain those friends respond in kind. God is truly a friend.



Bob Turner is married to Sheryl and they have been married for nearly 28 years. They have three children and three grandchildren. Bob graduated from the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver in 1993 and completed the Master's Program at Bear Valley in 2008. They have served as a part of the mission's team in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada for nearly 5 years and Bob served as the pulpit minister for the Greenbrier Church of Christ in Greenbrier, Arkansas for almost 11 years. In August of 2008 Bob began working with the Bear Valley Bible Institute, as an instructor, and in March, 2009 took the responsibilities as the Director of Extensions.

Building A Better Relationship With Our Congregation

Introduction:

- A. I enjoy spending time with brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 1. I enjoy lectureships where we can study God's word together.
 - 2. I enjoy opportunities of communicating through e-mail, Facebook. etc.
 - 3. I enjoy potlucks, a time to share a meal together and visit about life.
 - 4. I also enjoy our time of worship together, each Sunday morning and evening and then during the midweek. It is always a boost to see my fellow Christians and encourage one another.
- B. Maybe you enjoy and feel the same way I do, at least I hope we all feel this way. But, several questions are raised in regards to our topic.
 - 1. How can we build better relationships with our congregations?
 - 2. Will instituting more potlucks, having more programs, planning more activities provide the answer?
 - 3. Who needs to be involved in order to build these better relationships?
 - 4. Is this the job of the leadership, preachers, teachers, elders, deacons?
 - 5. How do we get those who are just not as outgoing to become more engaged and involved with the work and worship of the church?
 - 6. Perhaps one of the most disturbing areas of need within the church is how do we keep from losing our new Christians and strengthen those who are striving and struggling to grow?
- C. Scripture also deals with a very similar situation regarding the need to build better relationships within the church.
 - 1. The book of Hebrews is one that emphasizes this idea of better. We have a better hope, because we live under a better covenant because it is based on the better promises of God through the better sacrifice of Christ.
 - 2. Wrapped up in this idea as presented by the writer of the book of Hebrews, is the need for building better relationships within the church.
 - 3. Notice the text of Hebrews 10:19-25.
 - a. We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.
 - b. It is a new and living way.
 - c. He serves as our great priest.
 - d. As a result, the writer embarks upon a discussion of what we should do that will help build better relationships within the

church, focusing around the idea of encouragement.

Main Point: Encouragement engages the church to build better relationships.

Key Text: Hebrews 10:19-25 provides us with the basis for this encouragement.

- I. ***Purity of Life and Faith*** "let us draw near with a sincere heart, full assurance of faith"
 - A. The terminology here is used as an analogy of what these Christians would have been familiar with from the Old Testament priesthood. There are four key parts listed to our drawing near:
 1. Sincere heart indicates an un-hypocritical heart. Nothing added. The latin word for sincere is one that meant "without wax." Nothing was added, if something was added it was no longer sincere.
 2. Full assurance of faith emphasizes the confidence we have that results from our faith. How powerful is this thought in light of what follows in chapter 11. Throughout this chapter we find the confidence demonstrated on the part of these men and women of God because of their faith.
 3. Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Every act we are involved in that is contrary to the known will of God defiles our conscience. As long as it continues disrupts our relationship, union, fellowship with God and His people. The reference to hearts sprinkled clean is a symbolic reference to the application of the blood of Jesus, as in Heb. 9:11-14.
 4. Bodies washed with pure water is a reference to baptism, similar to the washing of regeneration as in Titus 3:5.
 - B. The idea presented states that as Christians we are able to draw near or close because of these four stated areas. Therefore, as we are considering today in each of the lessons concerning building better relationships, our lives need to reflect this on a daily basis.
 1. The relationship we have with God.
 2. The relationship we have as husbands and wives.
 3. The relationship we have as parents and children.
 4. The relationship we have with other generations and friends.
 5. It is vital in every relationship we share in this life, to make sure the influence we have is based on the relationship we have with Christ and our God.
 - C. I recently heard a story of a young child talking with their parent on the way home from Bible class one Sunday morning. The child asked the parent, I learned today that God is bigger than us. Is that true? The parent said, yes, He is bigger than any of us. The child then responded by saying, but He also lives inside of us, is that true? The parent again responded by saying yes. The child concluded by saying, if God is bigger than us and He lives in each of us, shouldn't He shine through?
 1. This is exactly what everyone we have a relationship with should see, God shining through us.
 2. Our families, our friends, the communities where we live, should all recognize the example of Christ seen in our lives.
 3. This is why the four areas mentioned by the writer of Hebrews stand out

as so significant in this text. It is encouraging.

4. Encouragement engages the church to build better relationships.

II. ***Devotion of Hope*** "let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering"

- A. There are several key words and thoughts found in this statement.
 1. The idea of holding or holding fast is used several times in the book of Hebrews 3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:18; 10:23
 2. Confession involves the idea of our commitment. We confessed Jesus as Lord and committed our lives in service to Him.
 3. Hope is critical to the book of Hebrews: 3:6; 6:11,18,19 (2); 7:19; 10:23; 11:1. The obvious connection to faith is what makes chapter 11 so crucial to the overall thought. Their hope is in the promises of a God who cannot lie and will not fail or forsake them.
 4. Without wavering: While this may not be a phrase emphasized throughout Hebrews, the concept is what the whole book is about. These Christians were struggling with wanting to leave Christianity and go back to the Old Law.
- B. The life and example of Abraham is one that truly helps us in understanding this statement.
 1. Abraham's faith is one that needed to grow.
 2. He was called and Heb. 11 says out he went not knowing where he was going.
 3. While Genesis records for us times where we seem to see a lapse in his faith, the growth to what we see in Genesis 22, with the willingness to offer up his son as a burnt offering to God, is an incredible measuring device.
 4. The area I want us to think about involves the announcement of Isaac's conception and birth.
 - a. Consider the ages of Abraham and Sarah (100 and 90).
 - b. Paul records in Romans 4:19-21 that Abraham viewed himself as good as dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb.
 - c. However, notice the remainder of the section. "With respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, he was able also to perform."
- C. This same idea must be present in our commitment as Christians today. This inspires encouragement for building better relationships.
 1. Do others see our lives portraying the idea of hope in the promises our God has made to us?
 2. Are we holding fast to the commitment of our hope without wavering? This is where it really gets difficult, without wavering.
 3. If we are holding fast to the hope we have in Christ without wavering, then why do we struggle with opportunities on the job or family that would take us away from our worship and service to the Lord?
 4. If we are holding fast to the hope we have in Christ, without wavering, then why do we place more trust in how much money we have in the bank

or what we are able to accumulate in possessions than we do in what we are supposed to be laying up in heaven?

5. If we are holding fast to the hope we have in Christ, without wavering, then why do we struggle with sharing Christ with our friends, neighbors and co-workers?

III. ***Expression of love*** "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works"

- A. Stimulating one another to love and good works is emphasized through two areas addressed in the very next verse.
 1. Not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some.
 - a. We need to be honest with the text in realizing this passage is not referring to someone who is unable to attend because they are sick.
 - b. Literally, the idea of the word used is addressing the abandoning of the church assembly. Christians were finding ways to no longer meet with the saints and assemble in worship. Their faith was growing weak.
 - c. An empty pew does not stimulate anyone to love and good works. I cannot motivate you if I am not here.
 2. Encouraging one another and all the more as we see the day drawing near.
 - a. The key for expressing love, stimulating one another to love and good works also involves the incredible need for encouragement.
 - b. Our world is in need of encouragement and the same is true in the church.
 - c. Do we know how to encourage one another?
 - d. How do we encourage one another and all the more as we see the day drawing near. First, let's address the idea of the day drawing near.
- B. The day drawing near has incited much discussion, necessary or not.
 1. Some hold to the idea it refers to a day of persecution. This was obviously a problem these Christians were facing at this time.
 2. Some hold to the idea it refers to the day of judgment. This could also have some application to the text.
 3. Still others hold to the idea it refers to the day of worship, that would certainly fit the text we are examining.
 4. Regardless, it seems true that no matter what day is being referenced, encouragement is needed.
- C. Encouraging one another must be expressed to build better relationships.
 1. Sometimes we hold up the idea of encouragement in ways such as...
 - a. Just learning to smile at others.
 - b. Sending a card in the mail.
 - c. Giving someone a phone call and let them know they were missed.
 - d. Going by for a 15-20 minute visit.
 - e. These ideas are good and they are needed. I do not want to take away from them at all.
 2. However, encouragement to build better relationships goes a little further.
 - a. It means we're going to have to get involved in one another's lives.

- b. In order for me to know how to encourage you, I need to know more about you and what cares, needs, concerns you might have.
 - c. It means I need to know those areas where you struggle, where you are tempted, or maybe have even fallen into sin.
- 3. To build better relationships, we need encouragement.

Conclusion:

- A. Encouragement engages the church to build better relationships.
- B. How do we encourage others in the congregation to build better relationships?
 - 1. Take an active roll in learning those who are missing from the service.
 - 2. In Tamale, Ghana, West Africa, the congregations take note of anyone who misses the service that day and mentions them by name at the end of the service and prays for them.
 - 3. In Greenbrier, we had a member, who, every time he was going to be away from the assembly would call and let me know he was going to be gone and to let the congregation know why he was gone.
 - 4. We certainly need to determine a plan to encourage them to be involved in every assembling of the congregation.
 - 5. A Plan for building better relationships through encouragement:
 - a. Determine those within the congregation who can be involved in making a visit.
 - b. Visit the person, the sooner the better. The longer we wait to see them and address the situation, the less impact it will have to show our love and concern. It really becomes more discouraging.
 - c. Ask questions regarding why they missed the assembly. Try to determine if there are problems leadership needs to know about and address.
 - d. Pray with them and continue to pray for them after you leave.
 - e. Follow up by mailing a card and a phone call to let the member know how much you enjoyed visiting with them and that you are looking forward to seeing them at the next assembly.
- C. Our concern regards the church and the wellbeing of each member of the Lord's family.
 - 1. We can only imagine what the atmosphere of the church would be like during the worship services when each time we assemble all of the family is present.
 - 2. We can also imagine, what a testimony it provides for the community to see the kind of dedication and commitment we have in Christ, where we have placed our hope.
 - 3. Think about how much stronger our bond will be as brothers and sisters in Christ, when we have the type of relationships where we know there are those who love us and are working to encourage us at every turn in life.
 - 4. Encouragement engages the church to build better relationships.

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