



RELATIONSHIPS

SCRIPTURE VERSES (NIV)

Genesis 2:18

¹⁸ The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Proverbs 17:17

¹⁷ A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Ecclesiastes 7:8-9

⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.

⁹ Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Matthew 7:12

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 12:17

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

Ephesians 4:2-3

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,
²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 1:19

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

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Emotionally Healthy Christian Seeks the Same
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EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY CHRISTIAN SEEKS THE SAME

Rick Warren

“The righteous choose their friends carefully.” (Proverbs 12:26a NIV)

If you wait for the perfect wife or the perfect husband, it isn't going to just happen. Let me tell you why: We're all broken. That's OK, because God still loves you. But you need to understand that anybody you marry will be broken. Everybody's broken, but some people are a lot more broken than others. And you need to avoid them no matter how good-looking, rich, or nice they are. You have to figure out the emotional health of your potential partner before you enter into a long-term relationship. Why am I saying this? Study after study has shown that 80 percent of all separations and divorce happen because one or both of the partners are emotionally unhealthy. I'm going to give you a partial checklist of emotional health factors. These aren't my opinion; this is what God says you need to avoid.

Whoever you marry must not be nursing any uncontrolled anger. Proverbs 22:24 says, *“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person; do not associate with one easily angered”* (NIV). Do you know why? Because uncontrolled anger reveals deep insecurity and low self-worth.

Whoever you marry must not be stuck in an addiction. Proverbs 23:20 says, *“Don't associate with people who drink too much wine or stuff themselves with food”* (TEV). Only two things are mentioned here, food and alcohol, but there are a thousand ways to get addicted.

Whoever you marry must not be harboring bitterness. Bitterness is like a poison — it eats you alive. Whatever you resent, you begin to resemble. To stop resenting; you've got to release it. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:15 *“Guard against turning back from the grace of God. Let no one become like a bitter plant that grows up and causes many troubles with its poison”* (GNT).

Whoever you marry must not be selfish. Why? Proverbs 28:25 says, *“Selfishness only causes trouble.”* When it comes down to it, the number one cause of conflict in marriage is simple: selfishness.

Whoever you marry must not be greedy. Proverbs 15:27 says, *“Greed brings grief to the whole family”* (NLT). If you marry a greedy spouse, you will be in debt your entire life.

Whoever you marry must be generous and kind. The Bible says, *“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed”* (Proverbs 11:25 NIV). And, *“Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves”* (Proverbs 11:17).

Whoever you marry must tell the truth. Proverbs 20:7 says this: *“A righteous person lives on the basis of his integrity. Blessed are his children after he is gone”* (GWT). Love is based on trust, and trust is based on truth. If you don't tell me the truth, I can't trust you. And if I can't trust you, how can I love you?

“God always gives his best to those who leave the choice to him.” When you want God's best, you have to ask him for it, not ask God to bless your faulty decision.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are some other emotional health factors that you think God wants you to consider?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES

Rick Warren

“Encourage one another and help one another.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11 TEV)

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *“Encourage one another and help one another”* (TEV). You are to build up, motivate, and inspire other people. How do you do that? You can do it three ways: You can give people hope, you can help people overcome their fears, and you can help people break down barriers.

First, you need to give people hope. You show that you’ve been through the same thing, and you reassure them that they’ll be able to get through it, too. You show through your story that it can be done.

When you share your experiences with other people, you help take away their fears. It’s kind of like riding a roller coaster. When you go to Six Flags and you’ve never been on one of those huge roller coasters, you’re kind of thinking, “Is this a smart decision?” Then, the person in front of you turns around and says, “This is a great ride. I’ve been on it five times.” So you’re thinking, “OK, I’m going to live. They’ve done it five times. It’s got to be OK.” Having someone share with you who’s already gone through it is an inspiration. It’s motivational.

How many first-time mothers feel scared to death, unprepared, and inadequate? All of them! How grateful they are for somebody who comes along and says, “Babies cry. It’s OK. It’s OK to let them cry. This is normal.” The fears that they’re experiencing don’t seem so daunting when others share with them their experiences and how they came through them. It gives them hope!

You also help people break through barriers when you motivate them with your own experience. Roger Bannister was the first guy to run a four-minute mile. At the time, everybody said it was an impossible barrier. Yet within about a year after Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, a dozen other guys had done it. All of a sudden, people realized it wasn’t impossible, and it gave them hope that they could do it, too.

You have experiences in your life that could be barrier busting, inspirational, and motivational to other people — if you’re willing to share them. The most powerful way to say anything is the most personal way to say it.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:6, *“For your sake, my friends, I have applied all this to Apollos and me, using the two of us as an example, so that you may learn.”*

Whenever I teach a series on marriage, I always go back and talk about the marriage problems Kay and I have had. Why? Because it has the credibility of reality and people can go, “They don’t have a perfect marriage, and we don’t, either. But they’ve lasted nearly 40 years. Maybe we can, too.” Perfection never helps anybody — except when it’s Jesus.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are the painful or difficult experiences from your past that could help others learn and give them hope?
- ◆ What are the avenues or mediums you could use to share your experiences? How can you pray for God to give you opportunities to share?

COME AS YOU ARE

Rick Warren — July 1, 2015

“God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:8 NLT, second edition)

Everything that Jesus did for you he did out of love. The Bible says that God made you to love you. The only reason you’re alive is because you were made to be loved by God.

God didn’t just say he loved you; he showed it. The Bible says, *“God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners”* (Romans 5:8 NLT, second edition). It says while we were still sinners. Before you even knew God, before you even knew you needed God in your life, Jesus died for you.

There’s a myth that says you’ve got to clean up your act before you can come to God: “I’ve got to get it all together. There are a few things I’ve got to get right in my life first, and then I’ll go to God.”

It’s like when we brush our teeth before we go to the dentist to have a teeth cleaning or when we wash the dishes before we put them in the dishwasher!

God says, “No, no! You don’t have to clean up your act. Just bring it all to me. Bring me all your problems. I have all the answers. Come as you are.”

The Bible says, *“You will be saved, if you honestly say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and if you believe with all your heart that God raised him from death. God will accept you and save you, if you truly believe this and tell it to others”* (Romans 10:9-10 CEV).

God is not asking you to make a promise you cannot keep. God is asking you to believe a promise that only he can keep.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are the things you’ve been trying to clean up before you approach God?
- ◆ How do you think it makes God feel to be rejected by his creation?
- ◆ What does it mean to you that God accepts you just as you are?

THE GREATEST GIFT OF LOVE IS ATTENTION

Rick Warren — May 26, 2015

“Give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10 NCV)

The Bible says in Galatians 6:10, *“Give special attention to those who are in the family of believers”* (NCV). So why do people in the family of God get special attention?

Because whatever you pay attention to is going to grow. If I pay attention to my garden, it’s going to grow. If I pay attention to my kids, they’re going to grow. If I pay attention to my marriage, it’s going to grow. If I pay attention to my work, it’s going to grow.

What is the greatest gift of love? It’s not diamonds, flowers, or chocolate. The greatest gift of love you can give is focused attention. You can affirm people just by looking them in the eye, which essentially tells them, “I value you. What you have to say is important to me because you matter to me.” What people want more than anything else is focused attention. They want to know that their thoughts matter, that their lives matter, that they are valuable. The essence of relationships is not what we do for each other or what we give to each other. The essence of relationships is how much of ourselves we give to each other. I can’t tell you how many men I’ve talked to who said, “I don’t understand it. I provide everything my family needs. I give my wife everything she needs. I give my kids everything they need. What more do they want?”

They want you! They want your time. They want your attention. They want your focus. They want to know that you think they matter. Nothing can replace time. Kids don’t need things; they need time. Marriages need time and friendships need time and small groups need time.

This weekend, look for opportunities to show attention to the people in your life. That is the greatest gift of love you can give! But don’t just wait for it to happen; make opportunities to show attention.

If you have to put it in your schedule, do it. If you have to give up Netflix time, do it. If it means putting off housework, do it. If you have to make sacrifices, do it. Do whatever you need to do to give your relationships attention. It is essential to their growth!

Talk It Over

- ◆ How can you practice giving more attention and focus to the time that you spend with people?
- ◆ What are the things that take time away from growing your relationships?

PEOPLE PLEASING IS IDOLATRY

Rick Warren

“I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.” (Galatians 1:10 NLT)

In life, you only have to please one person. And that is your Creator. You only have to please the Lord, the one who made you and has a purpose for your life.

That simplifies life enormously! You only need one person’s approval: God’s.

Jesus said it like this in John 5:30: *“I don’t try to please myself, but I try to please the One who sent me”* (NCV). *He said, “I’m living for an audience of one.”*

You may have never realized this, but people pleasing is a form of idolatry. The first commandment in the Ten Commandments is, “Don’t have any gods before me.” Anything you put before God becomes a god. So a boat could be a god. A career could be a god. A girlfriend could be a god. Golf could be a god. Anything that becomes number one in your life that isn’t God becomes your god.

The second commandment is, “Don’t make any idols.” Anything that replaces God in your life is an idol. Success can be an idol. Money can be an idol. Sex can be an idol. A relationship can become an idol. If that relationship to your girlfriend, your wife, your boss, or your friend is more important than God, it’s an idol.

When you are a people pleaser, you have allowed something other than God to take first place. All of a sudden it becomes god in your life, because their opinion matters more than God’s opinion. What they think of you matters. You don’t want to tell them you’re a Christian because they might think less of you. You don’t want them to know you go to church because they may not like you. At that point, you have another god in your life. You have an idol.

You only have to please one person. Paul says in Galatians 1:10, *“I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant”* (NLT).

Talk About It

- ◆ What in your life have you made your idol?
- ◆ What does that idol offer that God does not? What does God offer that your idol does not?

RELATIONSHIPS REVEAL WHAT IS UNHEALED

Rick Warren — May 21, 2016

“In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery” (Proverbs 28:23 NLT, second edition).

If you're dating and you're prolonging a relationship that you know is going nowhere, don't continue it. "But I won't have anybody to take me out on Friday night," you say. A bad marriage is a million times worse than not going out on Friday night! The longer you're in an unhealthy dating relationship, the more difficult it's going to be to get out of it.

If the relationship is healthy, you should be able to ask each other the tough questions about any anger, resentment, or bitterness in your lives. I'd encourage you to talk about any hurts, habits, or hang-ups you have in your lives. If you can't have these conversations with each other, that's a huge warning sign about the relationship. **Regardless of the emotional state of your partner, your emotional health begins with a personal relationship with Jesus.** If you don't have that, you need to start there. You need to get spiritually connected to God.

Next I want to challenge you to commit yourself to God's standard and not let your emotions sway you into making an unwise decision. It's possible to think you've fallen in love when all you've really done is fall in love with the idea of being in love. And that may lead to a decision you'll regret!

God knows you can get lonely, frustrated, tempted, or feeling like there's no hope. But in Jeremiah 29:11, God says he's working in your life to give you a hopeful future.

Don't date until your own emotional hurts are healed or at least until you're in the healing process. We've got to get rid of any bitterness in our lives. Get rid of any anger in our lives. In other words, we've got to deal with our own baggage. I remember marrying a couple many years ago at Saddleback. About five years later we had them over for dinner. The woman told me, "When I walked down the aisle in that white dress, I had no idea that I was carrying an entire bag of emotional garbage on my back. And I took all that garbage into the marriage."

Marriage does not create problems. It reveals them. The more you can deal with it before you get married, the happier, more God-honoring, and more fulfilling your marriage is going to be. You and your spouse will develop a deep soul intimacy that is personal, spiritual, even sexual. It is the oneness that comes from being unified by a relationship to God.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are the hurts, habits, or hang-ups you need to address before you get married?
- ◆ We all have hurts, habits, or hang-ups; ask God where you need healing and how he can help you do that.
- ◆ How would your relationships change if you committed to God's standards?

RIGHT + RUDE = WRONG

Rick Warren

“Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something wrong, you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin, too.” (Galatians 6:1 NCV)

Everybody in your life is going to disappoint you at some point. Why? Because nobody's perfect!

So how do you deal with disappointing people? How does love respond when people disappoint us?

The Bible says in Galatians 6:1, *“Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something wrong, you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin, too”* (NCV).

The loving response to people who disappoint you is to be gentle, not judgmental.

How do you have tough conversations with people in a gentle way? How do you confront people you love when you see they're doing something they shouldn't be doing? The Bible tells us to do it gently and with respect, not harshly or in a rude or mean way.

Here's a little equation to keep in mind: Right + Rude = Wrong.

It doesn't matter if you're right. If you're rude about it, nobody's going to care what you have to say. They're just going to get defensive! So you should respond in a gentle and loving way if you want to get through to someone who has disappointed you.

Proverbs 15:4 says, *“Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit”* (NLT).

We always have a choice *how* we speak to somebody — especially with our kids. Have you found how deeply hurtful words can wound a child? You can scar them for years. But the Bible says that kind words are words that will heal and help. So when your kids mess up, don't get on their case and tell them whatever you think they are at the moment. Give them a vision of how things could be! Speak words of life and health and hope into them, not harsh words of judgment. Be gentle.

It's the same way in our close relationships or roommates. How many problems could be avoided if we just waited a beat and used words that are gentle and kind and not harsh or vindictive? We need to learn to cut each other some slack and be kind and gentle in our speech and responses.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What is your typical response when you have to deal with someone when you know you were right about the situation?
- ◆ If you were to evaluate your daily speech, how much of it would you say is gentle?
- ◆ Think of a time when someone disappointed you. How would a gentle response have diffused the problem and affected the outcome for the better?

WHAT DOES GOD THINK OF YOU?

Rick Warren — January 22, 2015

“The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end.” (Isaiah 54:10 GNT)

If you don't feel loved by God, you're certainly not going to offer love to anybody else. It is impossible to be loving unless you understand and remember the way God loves you.

You need to remind yourself every day what God thinks about you — not what the world thinks or what you think about yourself. That is what removes your fears.

Let me give you four things God thinks about you to help you remember why and how to love.

You're completely accepted.

We spend much of our lives trying to earn acceptance from our parents, peers, those we respect, those we envy, and even total strangers. But you need to realize God has already settled this issue of acceptance: *“Jesus ... made us acceptable to God”* (Titus 3:7 CEV). What Jesus did on the cross made you completely acceptable to God — no matter what you've done or will do.

You're unconditionally loved.

God doesn't say, “I love you if ...” or “I love you because ...” He says, “I love you — period!” You can't make God stop loving you, because his love is not based on what you do but on who he is. Isaiah 54:10 says, *“The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end”* (GNT).

You're totally forgiven.

Because Jesus died on the cross and gave his life as a payment for your sins, you are totally forgiven. Romans 8:1 says, *“There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus”* (NLT). God doesn't rehearse your sins; he releases them.

You're considered extremely valuable.

There are two things that create value: who owns something, and what somebody's willing to pay for it. You are a child of God and *“have been bought and paid for by Christ”* (1 Corinthians 7:23 TLB). Jesus Christ paid for you with his life. That's how valuable you are.

When you remember that you are accepted, loved, forgiven, and valuable to the Creator of the universe, you will be better equipped to show that love to others and build deeper relationships.

Talk It Over

- How should the way God thinks of you change the way you think about yourself?

WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

Rick Warren

“For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does.” (Psalm 33:4 NLT)

One of the great questions of life is, “Who are you going to trust?” The way you answer that question will determine whether you’re happy or miserable, whether you succeed or fail, whether you make something of your life or you waste your life.

Let’s consider the options. Are you going to trust Congress? Probably not. Their credibility is kind of low right now. Are you going to trust the media? Why would you when you never know if they’re telling the truth? Are you going to trust popular opinion? Not too smart when it’s changing by the second.

Are you going to trust in yourself? That’s actually pretty stupid, too, because emotions lie. If you live by your emotions, you are going to be manipulated the rest of your life by other people and by your changing moods.

If you’re going to entrust your life and your future to someone or something, you’d better choose someone who has your best interest at heart, knows everything, is perfect, and will never lie to you. That kind of limits your options — to God.

No one is ever going to always tell you the truth. They’re going to shade it. They’re going to filter it. They’re going to make it sound nice. They won’t tell you what you need to hear. But what you need to hear is the truth, because it is the truth that sets you free. Lies about yourself, others, the world, and how life really is only keep you in bondage.

To be set free, you must have the truth. As I’ve said many times, the truth will set you free, but first it makes you miserable. We don’t like the truth. We don’t want to hear that most of the problems in our lives were brought on by poor decisions. We don’t want to hear that it’s our own stubbornness and ego and insecurity that causes the stress in our lives, but it’s true.

Psalm 33:4 says, *“For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does”* (NLT).

God said it, and that settles it — whether or not you believe it. God isn’t waiting on your opinion to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong. If God says it, it’s true.

You can trust God.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What will you trust God for today?
- ◆ Why is it often easier to believe the lies we hear from other people or the media instead of trusting in God’s truth?
- ◆ Do you accept all of God’s Word as truth? Why or why not?

I CONSIDER YOU MY FRIEND

“A friend is a treasure who loves you as you are, sees not only who you are but who you can become, is there to catch you when you fall, shares your everyday experiences, accepts your worst but helps you become your best, understands your past, believes in your future, accepts you today just as you are, and comes in when the whole world has gone out.”

We all need friends like this, don't we? The book of Proverbs provides wise counsel to help us select the right kind of companions. Consider the following verses: *“A friend loves at all times”* (17:17), *“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”* (18:24), *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend”* (27:6), *“A man's counsel is sweet to his friend”* (27:9). You see, genuine friendships are characterized by love, loyalty, and honesty. They not only support us, but they also have our permission to advise and even correct us when necessary.

That's why it's so important to make sure those closest to us are heading in the same direction we are. Although Christians can have relationships with unbelievers, we must realize that they are going the opposite way spiritually. That's why our dearest friends must be fellow believers who share the same love for the Savior. Godly companions are essential because they encourage us to walk obediently with Christ and stimulate us to become more like Him in our character, conduct, and conversation.

If you have such a friend, never take that relationship for granted. All genuine friendships must be built and nurtured. And if you are still searching for this kind of friend, please understand that it will require an investment of time, energy, and vulnerability on your part. The value you place on your friends is evidenced by the way you treat them. So let's consider what it takes to develop a deep friendship.

First of all, friendships require time spent together. If we're too busy to schedule time for a friend, that relationship will not flourish. I have some wonderful, godly friends with whom I talk every day. I truly enjoy getting together with them and consider our time together to be a valuable investment in our relationship.

Second, communication is essential. Initially, our conversations focus on learning who the other person is, but as the friendship develops, we become more transparent. This is a two-way process in which we both openly share our thoughts and feelings, and attentively listen, as we seek to understand the other person. As trust increases, we feel safe to talk about things we've never told anyone else.

The third requirement for a genuine friendship is shared life experiences. We rejoice together over each other's accomplishments and sympathize with the defeats, trials, and heartaches. Do you have someone with whom you can both laugh and cry? I have a few friends who encourage me whenever we're together. They make me laugh, but they also comfort me when my heart is broken. I seek their counsel when I'm trying to understand what the Lord would have me do, and sometimes they offer guidance when I don't even realize I need it. Whatever experiences I go through, they share them with me.

Fourth, true friends demonstrate their love for each other. Their relationship is characterized by gratitude and thoughtfulness. With today's technology, it's easy to encourage a friend with a call, email, or text message. Another way genuine friends show their love is by being unselfish and loyal. They are quick to help each other, even if it's inconvenient, and won't abandon the other person when everyone else does. Friends accept each other's weaknesses and failures, and they are quick to forgive any offenses.

The Lord designed us to be relational beings, and He desires that we have intimate companionship with other people. Throughout my life, I've been blessed with a number of faithful friends. The best thing about each of them is that they help me become the person God wants me to be. The richest relationships are always centered on the Lord and His desires for us. My prayer is that you will experience a mutual friendship that encourages you and your friend to become more like Christ.

Prayerfully yours,

Charles F. Stanley

TELL YOUR STORY

Rick Warren — May 11, 2015

Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue; I will proclaim Your greatness. —Psalm 145:6 (NLT)

Michael Dinsmore, a former prisoner and relatively new Christian, was asked to give his testimony in a prison. After he spoke, some inmates came to him and said, “This is the most exciting meeting we’ve ever been to!” Michael was amazed that God could use his simple story.

In 1 Timothy, after Paul had charged Timothy to stay the course preaching the gospel (1:1-11), he shared his personal testimony to encourage the young man (vv.12-16). He told about God’s mercy in his own life. Paul said that he had mocked the Lord, but He changed him. In His mercy, God not only counted him faithful and gave him a job to do, but He also enabled him to do His work (v.12). Paul considered himself the worst of sinners, but God saved him (v.15).

The Lord is able! That is what Paul wanted Timothy to see, and what we need to see too. Through Paul’s testimony, we see God’s mercy. If God could use someone like Paul, He can use us. If God could save the worst of sinners, then no one is beyond His reach.

Our story of God’s work in our lives can encourage others. Let those around you know that the God of the Bible is still at work today! —Poh Fang Chia

Father, thank You for the salvation You offer and that no one, including me, is beyond the reach of Your mercy, grace, and transforming power. Help me share my story with others so that people can see Your love.

No one is beyond the reach of God’s love.

INSIGHT: Before Paul’s conversion he put Christian believers in prison and was present for at least one murder—that of Stephen, who was stoned for preaching about Christ (Acts 7:59–8:1). Yet after his conversion Paul sums up his former life in just three words, telling Timothy that he was “a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” (1 Tim. 1:13). He then tells what God has done for him (1 Tim. 1:13-17), reminding us that it is not who we were that is important; it is what God has done for us.