

KINGDOM BUSINESS BASICS

Lesson Eleven – Kingdom Relationships



Introduction

In the tapestry of creation, God emphasized the importance of relationships by creating woman, ensuring man was not alone. This foundational bond set the stage for the rich network of connections that define human experience, reflecting God's desire for intimacy and community.

Jesus exemplified this by choosing friendship as a cornerstone of His Kingdom-building strategy. He gathered a diverse group, nurturing deep connections and demonstrating how relationships can transform the world. Through this model, we are inspired to build meaningful bonds that foster love, unity, and positive change in our lives and beyond.



Question: What relationship has been impactful to you?

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9

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The Power of Kingdom Relationships

When I contemplate the transformative power of a Kingdom relationship, I am inspired by the incredible journey of Ron and Rick Betenbough. This father-son duo epitomizes the truth that together, they can achieve far more than they ever could alone. Their shared endeavor, Betenbough Homes, not only reaped remarkable success but also filled their lives with joy and fulfillment, mirroring the wisdom of Jesus, who sent His disciples out in pairs, as outlined in scripture.

As they navigated the complexities of their Kingdom business, challenges and setbacks were inevitable. Yet, what set them apart was their unwavering commitment to lifting each other up during tough times. The warmth of their friendship became a guiding light, particularly during the turbulent housing market of the 1990s and personal struggles. Rick and Ron found that love, transparency, and encouragement can turn difficulties into opportunities to experience God's faithfulness in profound ways.

Central to their remarkable friendship was a deep understanding of the power of a threefold cord. They recognized that by integrating the Kingdom of God into their relationship as the essential third strand, their bond grew unbreakable. With Christ anchoring their connection, their relationship weathered the tests of time and exemplified their steadfast commitment to each other and to God.

The essence of their Kingdom relationship is built on these key components: fruitfulness, unwavering support, warmth, protection, and the strength of the threefold cord. These principles are not just insights; they are a call to action for each of us to implement in our own relationships, empowering us to cultivate connections that are both resilient and impactful.

Block Kingdom Relationships

The manifestation of God's Kingdom often provokes fierce opposition from the enemy, as seen throughout the Bible. From Herod's attempt to kill the infant Jesus to Satan's temptation in the wilderness, these forces have consistently tried to thwart the plans of

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God. The early followers of Christ faced similar challenges, with internal disputes in Acts 6, the split between Paul and Barnabas, and divisions in the Corinthian church.

These examples demonstrate Satan's relentless efforts to disrupt Kingdom relationships, recognizing their power and importance in advancing the Kingdom of God. Below, we are going to look at some ways we block or allow the enemy to block Kingdom relationships.

Self – This is not surprising but self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, self-pity, and selfish ambition do not foster Kingdom relationships, because it takes two to have a relationship and if you are only focused on self, there is no room for someone else.

Fear – A second challenge to friendships is fear—fear of rejection, fear of being hurt, fear of being honest, and more. Many people carry these fears, unknowingly hindering their potential for meaningful, Kingdom relationships. Fear often takes root in unhealed wounds from the past or family beliefs. By bravely confronting these fears, we can embrace the true friendships that God desires for us.

Comparison - Friendship thrives on mutual respect and appreciation, not comparison. When we measure ourselves against others, we open the door to pride, envy, or feelings of inadequacy, all of which erode the foundation of genuine connection. Like King Saul's jealousy of David, comparison can poison even the most promising relationships. By celebrating our differences and supporting each other's growth, we cultivate relationships that inspire and uplift, creating a world where everyone can shine without dimming another's light.

Offense - The spirit of offense is a dangerous and deceptive force that can easily infiltrate our relationships, driving a wedge between us by fixating our minds on negativity and dissatisfaction. This mindset can plant seeds of discord, leading to misunderstandings and hurt feelings. As these negative sentiments take root, they

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grow and spread, making it increasingly difficult to nurture and sustain healthy connections. It is vital to recognize this destructive spirit of offense early on and address it head-on. By doing so, we can uphold the spirit of forgiveness and understanding, ensuring that our relationships remain strong and harmonious.



Question:

Share a time when you and a friend have been able to accomplish more together than could have been done alone.

- How was it more enjoyable?
- How was it more productive?

Take a few minutes and evaluate yourself in these areas:

- Is self, fear, comparison or offense holding you back from fruitful relationship at work?
- Write down a situation where self, fear, comparison or offense created an issue in your relationship. Now that you know it causes harm in your relationship, how are you going to change?

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Group Work -

Vibrant Tapestry

God's Kingdom is like a vibrant tapestry, beautifully woven from the diverse threads of people's personalities, talents, and skills. To illustrate this, let's dive into the heartwarming story of Sarah and Allison and their friendship.

Sarah and Allison had been coworkers for years, but their friendship felt like a study in contrast. Sarah, an introvert, found comfort in the quiet moments they shared, while Allison, an extrovert, saw their relationship as an exciting adventure.

For Sarah, their weekly coffee meetups were a cherished highlight, adding a gentle ripple to her otherwise calm routine. She loved how Allison understood her need for solitude and never pressed her to join big gatherings, always allowing their friendship to unfold in a supportive way.

To Sarah, true friendship meant being able to enjoy comfortable silences and have deep, meaningful chats. She truly valued the connection they shared and appreciated how Allison respected her boundaries while keeping their bond strong.

On the flip side, Allison viewed her friendship with Sarah as a thrilling journey of discovery. She saw their time together as a treasure to discover from shared experiences, like spontaneous movie nights and fun walks in the park.

For Allison, Sarah's calming presence brought balance to her energetic spirit. Allison loved introducing Sarah to new adventures but was always careful not to overwhelm her. To her, their friendship was the perfect mix of energy and tranquility, with each of them complementing the other's strengths.

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Despite their differences, Sarah and Allison found a wonderful harmony in their connection. They learned to appreciate each other's unique perspectives, creating a bond that beautifully bridged their differences.

As we explore relationships in God's Kingdom, it's so important to embrace each person for who they are, meeting them on their individual journeys. Instead of trying to make everyone fit into our mold, let's celebrate the wonderful variety that God has created among us.

By doing this, we honor the unique craftsmanship of God, which shines through in each person, and we enrich our lives with the beauty of diversity. This welcoming approach helps us build a community that truly reflects the rich tapestry of God's creation, where every thread adds to the masterpiece of His Kingdom.

Building Good Communication

Relationships go nowhere without good communication; hence, the deeper your communication, the deeper the friendship can grow. However, to build good communication, you must work at it. There are three keys to building good communication: listening, encouragement, and properly handling conflict.

Listening

Listen with your heart, not just your ears. True listening is a gift that strengthens relationships. Here are couple of tips: engage fully, ask thoughtful questions, stay focused, reflect for clarity, seek deeper meaning, and manage your emotions.

In the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, we see a powerful example of Jesus' ability to listen deeply and compassionately. Despite cultural and religious barriers, Jesus engaged the woman in a meaningful conversation, demonstrating active listening and genuine interest in her life. He asked questions and responded thoughtfully to her concerns, creating a safe space for her to share openly about her past and her spiritual questions. Jesus' attentive listening

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allowed him to address the woman's deepest needs. By mastering the art of listening, you'll transform relationships just like Jesus.

Positive Connection

Fostering positive connections with others can be achieved through three powerful practices: expressing gratitude, sharing God's perspectives, and offering words of encouragement. Jesus exemplified this approach throughout His ministry, consistently uplifting and affirming those around Him. This practice goes beyond mere flattery; it involves recognizing the inherent value in our relationships.

Rick Betenbough, late and former CEO of Betenbough Companies, shares a poignant story that illustrates the impact of this practice: A leader had been in prayer about an upcoming project when he received a message from God. The message was, "Tell Jeff we're not proceeding with the marketing campaign." The next day, he conveyed this information to his team member, Jeff. Surprisingly, Jeff's reaction wasn't focused on the project's cancellation. Instead, he was deeply moved by the realization that God knew him by name. This story underscores how positive connection is powerful in a Kingdom relationship.

Properly Handling Conflict

Conflict in relationships is inevitable, but it presents a unique opportunity for growth and deeper connection. When handled with care and wisdom, disagreements can strengthen bonds and foster greater understanding.

Transforming Conflict into Connection - Embrace conflict as a catalyst for positive change. Instead of viewing it as a threat, see it as a chance to:

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- Uncover hidden issues
- Break through superficial barriers
- Enhance communication skills
- Forge stronger unity

Constructive Conflict Resolution - Approach disagreements with love, honesty, and a commitment to mutual growth:

- Focus on resolution, not winning
- Address issues promptly, preventing resentment from festering
- Communicate truthfully and lovingly, avoiding hurtful words
- Listen actively with an open mind and heart
- Forgive generously, letting go of hurt and bitterness

By embracing these principles, you can transform conflicts into steppingstones, leading to a more profound and resilient relationship.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

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Application:

Active Listening

To cultivate lasting Kingdom relationships, there's an effective exercise that significantly enhances communication: active listening. This practice not only sharpens our communication skills but also deepens our empathy and understanding—essential ingredients for establishing meaningful connections with others.

Instructions:

1. Divide participants into pairs.
2. The speaker shares a personal story or experience for 3-5 minutes.
3. The listener practices active listening techniques:
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Use nonverbal cues to show engagement (nodding, appropriate facial expressions)
 - Avoid interrupting
 - Focus entirely on the speaker, resisting the urge to formulate responses
4. After the speaker finishes, the listener summarizes what they heard, focusing on:
 - Key points of the story
 - Emotions expressed by the speaker
 - Any underlying needs or concerns they perceived
6. The speaker provides feedback on the accuracy of the listener's summary.
7. Partners switch roles and repeat the exercise.

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Reflection:

How did it feel to be truly listened to?

Were there any challenges they faced while listening actively?

What are some insights gained about effective communication?

Effective communication is central to building Kingdom relationships. It demands not just speaking but also a heartfelt interest in others, empathy, and the ability to listen without judgment. This exercise is a powerful way to develop these vital skills, paving the way for deeper Kingdom connections!



Further Study about the Kingdom Relationships

Lesson 4: Levels of Friendship

The word “friend” can mean a variety of things. Sometimes, we use it to describe a person we have just recently encountered or a friend with whom we share the most intimate details of our lives and who will continue to love us despite all our shortcomings. There needs to be a distinguishing line between friendliness and genuine friendship. Friendliness is an important starting point towards friendship and is something we need to cultivate with whomever we meet as it has warmth and helps create an atmosphere in which friendships can develop. However, it does not have great depth. Proverbs 18:24 warns us that the shallowness of never going beyond acquaintances can lead to ruin. Having many companions is not wrong, but it can hinder our developing deep friendships. Some people excel at superficial relationships and gather facts and information about a wide circle of acquaintances. But for a variety of reasons, they are never able to form quality friendships. But companions or casual acquaintances are not the same as real friends.

Levels of Friendship Number of people involved: One or two intimate friends-A, Few Really Good Friends-B, Group of Good Friends-C, Circle of Acquaintances-D, Many People I am Friendly-E, and Friendless-F.

Level F: Somewhere off the graph, a level F also exists, which describes a person who is totally friendless or uninvolved with anyone at any depth. The Lord Jesus, who is our model for friendships, was abandoned by His closest friends: “He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). The Gospels make it clear that Jesus knew what it was like to be left alone, identifying with the feelings of loneliness.

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Level E: Jesus had a large number of acquaintances at this level. The Gospels tell us that great crowds of people followed Jesus. Although it is not clear the level of these relationships, He always seemed willing to give some time to people who came up to him, like in Mark 10:16 with His warm response to the little children.

Level D: Jesus had a large group of disciples that He must have known on a deeper level than those in the crowds. We can assume that they spent time with Him and that He taught and trained them to some degree while they traveled about together. Luke 10:1 tells us that Jesus appointed 70 others and sent them out to bring the Kingdom's good news.

Level C: Mark 3:14 says, "And he [Jesus] appointed twelve so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach." The basis that Jesus decided to gather more disciples to His side was so that they could be with Him. This verse gives us an indication that Jesus wanted these men to be His friends for His sake as well as theirs. Jesus desired a circle of friends who were closer to Him than the larger group.

Level B: There were special occasions when Jesus selected an inner group of only three of the twelve disciples (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). It can be presumed that He felt close to them and wanted to share more of Himself with these heartfelt friends. At the end of His life, He told these three about the difficult time He was having, took them into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him, and asked them to help Him.

Level A: Even within this trio, one disciple was more convinced of Jesus's love than the others. This person is mentioned similarly in John 21:20, and most scholars agree that his name is John. There was a special rapport between Jesus and John, and this could be one of the reasons why the other disciples were so angry when John's mother was seeking special recognition for her sons (Matthew 20:20). When Jesus was on the cross, He demonstrated His unique relationship with the disciple whom He loved in John 19:26–27, by asking him from the cross to look after His mother, Mary.

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Jesus gave us a balanced example by operating at all these levels of relationships. Some people have a very low level of expectation in friendships, while others think all friendships should be at a level A. But, it is possible to be friendly towards everyone. And this should be the nature of a normal Christian: One who does not delight in distance but in closeness.

An elderly clergyman gave John Wesley this advice: “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember, you cannot serve God alone. You must find companions or make them.”

If you are interested in continuing your study about this topic, check out Prepare International Lubbock School (<https://hub.prepareinternational.org/lbk-school/>).