

Responsible Relationships

A loving person lives in a loving world. A hostile person lives in a hostile world.
Everyone you meet is your mirror.

KEN KEYES, JR.

To live fully, we must learn to use things and love people not love things and use people.

JOHN POWELL

Matthew 22: 37 – 40

Life is the sum of our relationships. God created us to have a loving relationship with him and out of that have a loving relationship with those around us. Whether we like it or not we have some type of relationship with everyone we are around. That relationship might be good or it might be bad but it is nevertheless a relationship. As Christians God expects us to have responsible relationships regardless of how others relate to us.

1) The need for responsible relationships

- God is a God of love which means that He is a God of relationship
 - When God made man in His image and likeness He made man to be a relational being.
 - This means that we have a natural need to have relationships with those around us
 - When man sinned his relationship with God was broken and then, losing the essence of his God likeness his relationships with others were also broken.
- We live in a broken society because society is made up of broken people with broken relationships.
- The effects of broken relationships
 - Bitterness, anger and resentment
 - Lack of trust
 - Insecurity
 - Loneliness
- The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. ERICH FROMM (1900–1980)
- Pride is the root of broken relationships
- Redemption not only restores our relationship with God but breaks down the walls of hostility between and leading us to practice responsible relationships.
 - Responsible relationships will in turn break down the effects of broken relationships
 - In other words our salvation cannot be lived out – worked out – in isolation but by necessity needs to be lived out in relationship with others for the work of redemption to be complete in us and society

2) What are the characteristics of responsible relationships

- As believers we aren't only called to have relationships with others – all people have relationships but their relationships aren't always good.
- We aren't only called to have good relationships with others – good relationships are good but not always responsible
 - I watched a movie about two friends who had a good relationship with each other – they were best friends – and they went and stole an ice-cream truck and gave all the ice-creams to the kids on the beach
 - They had a good relationship but they did not have a responsible relationship
 - Their relationship urged each other on to irresponsible living.
- As believers we are called to have responsible relationships:
 - With God – love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (Matth.22: 37)
 - With other believers – love one another as I have loved you (John 13: 34)
 - With society in general – love your neighbour as you love yourself (Matth. 22: 39)
 - With those who you wouldn't naturally relate to – love your enemies (Matth. 5: 44)
- Characteristics of responsible relationships:
 - Points people to God
 - If we do not point people to God then we fail in our primary responsibility in any relationship
 - Accountability – asks the hard questions
 - Good relationships are about making the other person feel good
 - Responsible relationships are about leading each other to live right.
 - Puts others needs before your own
 - By nature we are selfish. Our salvation causes us to die to self and put others before ourselves.
 - This does not mean we live irresponsibly to be responsible for others.
 - Seeks to restore brokenness in the other person and bring them to wholeness in Christ
 - Where there is a Christian community there shouldn't be a lonely person
 - The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer. It's the feeling of being uncared for, unwanted-of being deserted and alone. Mother Teresa
 - Neither should there be anyone who has no one to trust, who is insecure and doesn't know how to release his bitterness, anger, guilt and shame.
 - Commitment to the relationship
 - A responsible relationship lasts in good times and bad.
 - It recognizes that neither of you in the relationship is perfect and has faults
 - When we break relationship because of a fault of the other we have essentially judged the person and have not sought to understand him

- The responsible person seeks to understand the other before being understood.
- Has a good balance of rationality and emotion
 - Rationality thinks about doing what is right
 - Without rationality in a relationship people are bound to be led to do what is wrong
 - However we aren't merely rational but also emotional beings and without emotion in a relationship we are reduced to being mere rational robots.
 - Having a mere rational relationship would allow us the same relationship that we have with the trees – I do not want to harm it because it has not harmed me.

3) How to create responsible relationships

- Submit to God
 - Remember that all relationships are based on our relationship with God
 - Trying to build relationships with others without God is the same as building your house on the sand – they won't have any foundations and will probably eventually collapse
- Decide to form relationships irrespective of the attitude of the other person
 - Romans 12: 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone
- Forgive
 - MT 18:21 - 22 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times
 - When we don't forgive someone we do not only keep ourselves bound in unforgiveness but we condemn someone to a life of guilt that they cannot get free from even if they seek it.
 - It is thus the irresponsible person who withholds forgiveness from others.
- Reach out to someone who needs a friend
 - A book title: "If no one reaches no one gets touched"
 - How many people are lonely because so few of us are taking up the responsibility of forming relationships beyond our own circle
- Live a life of love
 - EPH 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
 - We cannot live a life of love in isolation. A life of love can only be lived out in relationship
- Sometimes the responsible thing to do is not to have a relationship with someone
 - 1 Cor. 5: 11 "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."