

## CREATING POWERFUL RELATIONSHIP

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In a world that seems more and more increasingly alienated, tonight I want to talk about relationships. And, more importantly, I want to talk about friendships and the role that we play in each other's life as a healing, loving force for good.

See, one of the things I'm really very aware of is: if God wanted to send one of us down here at a time, that would be fully possible. But the reality is that we weren't here ... we're not here by ourselves. And I think the reason for that is that we actually need each other to move forward in our spiritual evolution. That we actually need one another to take the steps necessary to heal and restore and be the man or woman that I think God is calling us to be.

Jesus said the most important thing were two things: that we love God and love our neighbor. And he said that that's pretty much the whole Gospel: those two things. Love God and love your neighbor. And yet, in the world we seem to be more and more moving into camps. Like, this camp doesn't always talk to this camp, and this camp doesn't always like this camp. And it seems like we're fragmenting more and more and more.

But what if our real purpose is just to love? And what if we all have that ability within us and we just do it or don't do it to whatever level we do? But what if that's the only thing? And what if, literally, we could heal the planet if we wanted to? And all the other things we're doing are all good and noble and fabulous ... but what if it really just comes down to, in the moment, we just love each other? All the weirdness in the planet is gone.

And the thing is: that's the thing we all want. Like nobody says, *"Oh, no; I have too much love in my life. Why don't you love somebody else? I have just too much love in my life."* [Congregants laugh] Right? Nobody ever says that! When you're going through a hard time, nobody says, *"Oh, I'm going through a hard time. I really don't need that much love."* Right? It's always about: How do we create more and more love to really do the work that God has put us on this planet to do?

And I think one of the jobs of church is to help people connect ... especially people who may not think they're alike. You know, one of the things I've always wanted to do is have a church that was big enough that it wasn't just one group. There wasn't just one group that kind of looked all alike; that believed all the same things; that was just all one group.

Because I think we actually need to be in spiritual community with people who we see as slightly different. Because in that activity of seeing people that are different, we also get an opportunity in their differences to also see our greater universal humanity. That everybody has similar things. Everybody cries and grieves and has pain and wants their family and loved ones to be well taken care of it. And there's a universality that's bigger than our differences.

And I think that the role of church has always been to be a place where we get to practice that; where we get to see that; where we get to go beyond our separateness and our differences and say, *"Man, that person is just like me!"* And to really own the community of what that means.

And tonight, I want to talk about creating powerful relationships. And when I came up with this talk idea, I really had no idea where I was going to go with it. I just liked that idea: creating powerful relationships. And as I got closer and closer to this talk, I still wasn't very sure where I was going to go with it. And then as I sat down to begin to write, the realization was, *"Oh! The most powerful"*

*relationships are the relationships where I feel loved and where I love with all that I am.*" And for me, it's those friendships; it's those connections that makes all the difference in the world.

And we're living in a world where many people are feeling isolated and alone and they want more connection. They want more friendships; they want more relationships in their lives. So, let's look at the levels of friendship.

The first level of friendship is the **ACQUAINTANCE** level. And we have ... acquaintances are friends that we may meet a few times -- either at parties or through mutual friends -- and we know their name. We might know a little bit about them. We probably haven't had a deep heart-to-heart conversation with them, but we've spent time with them. We know them.

Acquaintances are the people that we have kind of that superficial connection with. There's not been a lot of significant emotional involvement in our relationship, but there's acquaintances. It's fun to see our acquaintances. It's fun to see them smile and to know that we know people.

And they may be people that we see at the gym or they may be people that we see at church. And, you know, it's those maybe at the Starbucks; it's those people that are acquaintances. But in seeing our acquaintance -- and seeing them smile just because they see us -- it makes a difference, right? These are, you know, the friendly interactions; the casual chit-chat that we have with them. Again, at parties; at coffee shops; at the church; and maybe people we see on social media; maybe people that we have a network with. But this is kind of the ... This is maybe the lowest level of friendship is our acquaintance ... but we need acquaintances! We need people -- neighbors and people that we wave to on the street that we that we see.

And that this level of relationship is important, because this is the one where we can we can cast the biggest net. With our acquaintances, we can literally have maybe hundreds and hundreds of people that are our acquaintances that we connect with. And even though it's at a more superficial level, those acquaintance relationships -- those are important! They give us a sense of community and connection. And those relationships are meaningful!

Then the next level down -- or up -- depending on which way we're going, is the **CASUAL RELATIONSHIP**: the social friends. Maybe we have a friend from work or a book club we know; or maybe it's a circle group. And they are people that are more than just acquaintances; we have a foundation. We may have shared interest or activities, maybe around sports. We tend to -- in these casual relationships -- we know more about them; we feel a deeper connection with them.

And it's not the ultimate friendship, but those casual friendships really matter. They give us a sense of companionship. They give us, you know, shared people with shared interest; lighthearted conversation. And there's very low-pressure interaction, right? It's people that we can connect with; that we can talk to; that we can share. And it may not be your deepest friend, but those level of social friends are important.

And then the next level is the **CLOSE FRIENDS**. The close friends are our "besties." These are the people that are in our inner circle. They are the friends that we bonded with; that we talk often; we share our struggles. They know our ups and downs; they know our darkest fears. These are the people that share our values. They are our emotional support system.

The underlying characteristic of a close friend is that we trust them; that they are loyal; that we're comfortable in their presence. They console us in times of loss and heartbreak and grief. They understand our pain, and they offer us practical, emotional support. With our close friends, the characteristics is that we just have fun with them! We seem to be able to laugh and joke with them. They know our story; they love us anyway! [Congregants laugh] We have a common interest. There's a

sense of just ... they're just easy to be with. So we spend quality time with these people. We spend time with close friends. And that tends to be a priority in our life: to surround ourselves with our closest friends, and to do those things with our closest friends. Whether it's sharing holidays or celebrations or achievements, we want to go to our closest friends.

And oftentimes, with our closest friends, we look to them for advice. You know, they're a sounding board. [Laughs] They are the ones that we can go to when we're facing a dilemma or we have an idea. And we know with our closest friends that they'll tell us the way they really think about our harebrained ideas. [Congregants laugh]

Oftentimes, our closest friends are built on a foundation of love and care. They've been with us through the thick and the thin. They know our flaws, and they love us anyway. But there's also an accountability with our closest friends. Our closest friends, you know, are the ones that will tell us the truth, even when we don't want to hear it! Do you have friends like that? That will just tell you the truth – like, “No!” And they'll say ... you know, they'll give you that one look and you know you went one step too far.

And then the next level -- and I think is probably the most profound -- is the people that are our **LIFELONG FRIENDS**. And lifelong friends are the people that we've been friends with since maybe childhood. And these are the friends that we are our most authentic with. They know everything. They know our story; they know our ups and downs. They are steadfast. They've loved us forever. We count on it! We know that they love us. We know that they love us through everything that we've been through.

There's a shared experience. We have history with these people, a long history. There's a sense of belonging with lifelong friends. Sometimes lifelong friends actually feel more like family than some of our own family members! There's a timelessness with lifelong friends that we just know we can count on them. And there's memories that go back years, and jokes and inside stories and giggles, and ways that we tease each other that are just special and holy.

The difficulty with lifelong friends is, as we get older, lifelong friends start dying. And it's tough when we lose a lifelong friend. You know, a couple of years ago, I lost a lifelong friend. And at his memorial ... I was asked to do his memorial service, and I did his memorial service. And, you know, in the room there were probably 300 people. And there was his fishing group, and he was a DJ in San Diego. And there was this radio station group and his church friends. And they were all there.

But to me ... like, I know they all were his friends. But, to me, he was my lifelong friend. We've known each other since we were 13. And when he went ... he was one of the people that I could call literally day or night. And I know that, no matter what harebrained idea; no matter what the need or the solution; or whatever problem may have been, he would just listen and love me. And that would be the whole thing. He would just listen and love me. And if he thought I was crazy, he would tell me. You know, he would just ... And when he told me I was crazy, I wasn't offended by it! Right? Because it was probably true! [Congregants laugh] Right?

But I knew his story. Every bit of his story. And he knew mine. And those lifelong friends, when they're gone, we miss them so much. Because they've been with us almost from the beginning.

And so, how do you know when you have a good friend. So, I've got a little test for us, okay? So how do you know if you have a good friend? And one of the ways we know we have a good friend is they generally bring out our best. Like, in their presence, we want to be a better person. We want to strive to be and to be better than we've been before.

With a good friend, we trust them with all the information that is the most important to us, that we hold and guard and protect. But with a good friend, we hold that and we trust them -- that they will hold it at the same level of importance that we hold it.

With a good friend, we feel respected; that we are embraced for just who we are. With a good friend, there's a confidentiality. That we know that we can trust them; that we feel safe in their presence. Even in a disagreement, we feel safe. That we are open to conversations and constructive feedback as part of a dynamic activity of relationships.

And today, what I want us to see is that, sometimes as spiritual people, we get busy doing all of our spiritual stuff ... whatever your spiritual practice is; whatever you're doing; whatever difference you're trying to make in the world; whatever you're committed to. And what I want us to see is that sometimes we have to go back to the really the basic aspect of life. We have to go back to those things that are just pure. And I believe that friendship -- and having people in our life that love us and care about us -- is fundamentally important to our spiritual life and to our mental health.

And with all that's going on in the world, we really need to take time to say: Am I investing enough time and energy to develop the level of friendships that make my life meaningful and worthy of my time and attention?

You know, one of the books that really changed my life was Dr. Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*. And *The Five Love Languages*, for me, the first time I read it: it was such a window into the people around me. And really how to love them in the way that they wanted to be loved ... not just the way I wanted to love them, but really looking at the way that they wanted to be love.

And especially, for me, it really helped with my relationship with my children, because I realized that their love language wasn't necessarily my love language. And when I understood my children's love language, I could actually love them in a way that was more meaningful for them, not just the way that was easiest for me. And I think this is also true with our friendships. Like, when we can really show up in a way that makes a difference for our friends, it makes sure that our soul feels connected and well loved.

So, when you look at your life, are you building friendships that make a difference?

So, what are those love language? The first one is **WORDS OF AFFIRMATION**. People whose love language is words of affirmation thrive on praise; on encouragement; on compliments. They love to be built up. They want to hear a good word. They want to hear that you're proud of them; that you think that they're amazing. But when you use harsh words -- when you use criticism -- for people with words of affirmation, it's devastating to them. It's hard on them. It breaks their little hearts, right? And so, when we're loving somebody who needs words of affirmation, we have to be really careful and kind and gentle with our words.

The next one was **QUALITY TIME**. People who show love through quality time do so in just spending time. Just spending hours. My daughter's love language is quality time. And I'd be doing a hundred little things, and when it came to my daughter -- and her feeling loved -- I had to put everything aside and just be with her. Like, I could take her out miniature golfing. We could spend two hours miniature golfing. And if I took one phone call during that two hours of miniature golfing, the whole two hours was wasted, right? It didn't count! Because one phone call meant that it wasn't quality time anymore; that she did not have my uninterrupted attention.

And I learned quickly that to get to my daughter -- for my daughter to feel profoundly loved -- I had to just put my cell phone asleep and never look at it! Because in that two hours -- no matter what it was --

she had to be my undivided attention. Because it was quality time!

And the third one is **GIFTS**. People who respond to gifts are people whose love language really has just made a difference by those thoughtful gifts. And they don't have to be expensive, but they need to be heartfelt. They need to be thoughtful. They are tangible aspects of love. And it can be anything that is important to them. But it means that you went out; you went shopping; that you know them well enough to know what they would like. You go and pick it out, and you actually wrap it or you present it in such a way that that gift is a symbol for how much you love them.

Now, this is not my gift. I mean, I love gifts, but this is not my thing. This is ... Like, I'm not very good at picking out gifts. Right? And yet, the people who this is their gift: they are incredible gift givers. They find the right, perfect thing, and it's amazing.

**ACTS OF SERVICE.** People whose love language is acts of service believe that actions speak louder than words. For example, cleaning the garage can be a statement of undying love! [Congregants laugh] Doing the laundry can be the most romantic thing you've ever done! [Congregants laugh] Right? It can seem so superficial! And if your love language is acts of service, every little act of service matters! If you do the dishes, you're a star! If you leave the dishes in the sink, you're out. [Congregants laugh] Right? Because it's those acts of service! It's, *"I care enough about you to make your life a little bit easier; to do something that I can do today to make your life better."*

And the fifth one is **PHYSICAL TOUCH**. The fifth one is people who respond to physical touch; just have to touch. This is my love language. This is my son's love language. And it changed our relationship when we realized that we both had the same language!

Like, when my son was about 13 or so, he'd be walking down the hall in the house, and he'd just bump me. [Congregants laugh] And I didn't get it for a while. Like, *"Why is he bumping me?!?"* Right? And I realized he just wanted to touch me as we passed in the hall. And then what I began to do is: every time he bumped me, I'd grab him and hold him for a minute. And I wouldn't let him go until we had a hug. And then I realized, *"Now he's bumping me all the time!"* [Congregants laugh] Right?

He was like 14 or 15, and he would come and sit right next to me. Like, it's hot in Arizona! Like, if you're watching a movie and somebody sits right next to you, it's like, *"Give me some space!"* And his love language was: he would sit right next to me, and I would just wrap my arms around him, and he would just feel so loved. He didn't care how hot it was! He just wanted to be loved! And he didn't feel fully loved unless he was being touched. And once I got over myself and realized, *"That's the same thing I want!"* Like, we were two sides of the same coin!

And the thing that I want us to hear today is that we have the capacity to heal each other. To create relationships that are transformative. To restore our planet and heal our planet deeply because we are connected to one another.

So, here's your homework. You ready? I've got three things that I want you to do a homework this week.

The first one is: **I want you to call a lifetime friend and just thank them for being your lifetime friend.**

Thank you them for knowing your story. Thank them for putting up with you over all these years; for loving you in all the ways that they love you. If you have a lifetime friend, I want you to reach out to your lifetime friend and acknowledge them; thank them.

**I want you to acknowledge your close friends.** Maybe with a card or a smile or a connection or a phone call. To acknowledge your close friends and thank them for being your close friends.

And the third thing is: I want you to **make an effort to create more acquaintances and casual friends.** I want you to see if you can add more acquaintances by turning maybe a neighbor into an acquaintance;

or turning an acquaintance into a casual friend. And really look at your life: about building your social network of friends and really making a committed effort to increase the amount of people in your life that you know love you and you know you love them.

I believe that, during this time -- especially during this time, this political season -- we don't need more alienation. We don't need more people being at odds with each other. We need to be working together as a spiritual community to connect with one another in a way that really, truly, deeply makes a difference, and makes our heart feel good just by coming to church. Are you with me? [Applause]

Alright; here we go. Let's pray:

And I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul, and just feel how much love you have to give. And feel how much love you want. That most of us want more love. Most of us actually need more love. And in this activity of giving and receiving love, we actually heal our world; we heal our planet, we heal each other.

That today, I want you to make more friends -- at whatever level. But I want you to have an intention in your life that you're going to make more friends. That you're going to look for people that God drops in your life; look for the people that God's placing in your life over and over again, and really put the effort into making them friends.

So, in all things we look to God and in all things we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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