



The Fifth Law of Relationship

What Are Your Limits to Relationship?

I have a friend who has been a pastor for longer than I have. He has been with the same small church for thirty years. This pastor friend has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The cancer has spread throughout his body and now he suffers great pain that medications don't curb. During these last months and maybe even weeks, he has continued to preach on Sundays, and he leads two different Bible studies each week. He told me that he wants to make sure he has prepared everyone to walk with God and leave them with a strong spiritual foundation. His relationship with the people of the church has reached a level that few ever attain. It is a source of inspiration to me as I think about how important are others and what sort of a priority will I make of the people the Lord has put in my life.

We have taken time each week to consider the profound statement James the brother of Jesus makes regarding relationships. **My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?** (James 2: 1-7 NIV)

The fifth law of relationship is quite simple. Every person you come across is beloved by God. You will not meet someone who God does not point His finger at and declare, "I love that one." Consider the most quoted verse found in the Bible. Its familiarity makes it difficult to examine through fresh eyes but let's try. Here is a literal translation of John 3: 16. **For in the same way God loved the world that he gave his unique son in order that each one believing in him might not perish but could have eternal life.** We have grown so comfortable with this statement by John that we may have forgotten what a powerful and comprehensive declaration it is. It is in fact the pivot point for all contemplation. Every thought works its way through John 3: 16. Here are the questions that determine where we go from here on any matter. Does God exist? If He does, what is He like? Are we all simply dust to dust and ashes to ashes or is there more to us after we die? Honestly, many have brushed off these questions and given a solid "no" to the first of them. They have decided God does not exist. Until though you take a serious look at John 3: 16, you don't know where to turn in life, what sort of life you will have. If God is and He has love for us and there is eternal life as John insists, then that makes all the difference in what you do moving forward.

Jesus Christ, God in flesh had a close friend who died. His sister was Martha and when Jesus walked up to her, she was distraught. **"if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."** (John 11: 21 NIV) Martha wanted Jesus to somehow bring her brother Lazarus back to life. She wasn't sure how that was possible, and she had some doubts Jesus actually could, but Martha held out hope. Jesus' response to Martha was not exactly what she was expecting but it

was the answer she needed. **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** (John 11:25-26 NIV) If there is no resurrection, no life after death, then it really doesn't matter what we do, how we live, what are our accomplishments. They all will be lost in time and forgotten in the dust we become. But that is not how it is. Life is eternal and it comes directly from God. Here is the point. Your life matters because God has made you for eternal life and what you do and how you live is not forgotten in the sands of time, but it lives forever with you. More than that, what you do for others not only lives with you but lives with them too. Relationships are eternal and how they go lasts forever for all who believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life. It matters what you do and how you treat people because God gives us eternal life.

The beginning of John's declaration in John 3: 16 is, "God loved the world..." We are told just before in verses 14-15 how that love looks. **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.** (John 3:14-15 NIV) We don't have time to discuss the backstory of Moses holding up the bronze snake on the pole when Israel rebelled against God but what we must relive is how the Son of Man or Jesus Christ showed God's love to the world. He died on the cross in order to offer the forgiveness of sins to everyone, good or bad, evil or kind, generous or selfish. There is not a person you will meet who Jesus Christ did not love enough to die to bring salvation. The clerk who is tired and a bit grumpy, the police officer who gives you a ticket, the politician who doesn't agree with you and the family member who lies to your face. They all fit into the category of loved by God. Remember Jesus' very own words about the brutal human beings who nearly beat Him to death and then pounded the nails through His wrists and feet so He could die the most agonizing sort of death imaginable. **Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34 NIV) There you have the baseline of God's love for you and each person in the world. I forgive you. Have eternal life.

The same John who provides us with John 3: 16 makes this observation about love and it is weighty. **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** (1 John 4:10-11 NIV) If you accept John 3: 16 as true, then love becomes the basis of all relationships. Because Jesus died to take away your sin and give you eternal life, every person is yours to love. Lovable becomes an irrelevant category. There is not anyone in the class unlovable. You have not met someone unlovable. You won't come across someone unlovable. It may seem ludicrous with the sorts of people you may have encountered or heard about somewhere but given the "world" as the range of love God has set for Himself, it also is how far you are to love. John goes on to make this statement. **We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.** (1 John 4:19-21 NIV)

It gets hard to love sometimes, painfully hard. I read recently of a Ukrainian mother who was driving with her husband and two young daughters trying to flee the invading Russian army. Their car was struck by mortar fire and they were forced to get out but in seconds, her ten year old daughter was struck and killed and so was her husband. Grabbing her newborn, she barely escaped on foot. It will be very hard for her to ever love anyone who has served in the Russian army. Yet Christ Himself can give her the power to do so when the time comes to put that love of God to work. You may have someone you find tough to love, maybe even it seems impossible. Yet we can love any person we have in our lives because Jesus loved us and died to give us eternal life. That eternal life empowers supernatural love, God-love, powerful, unstoppable love that overcomes hatred and sin wherever it is found. When it seems like you can't love someone, when it feels like you have been disappointed too often, hurt too many times, there is a storehouse of love available to you that comes from God. **And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.** (Romans 5:5 NIV) If you can believe in God to give you eternal life, you can believe He has put enough of His own love in your heart to love any person, any time.