



The Seventh Law of Relationship

Does It Matter What You Think of Others?

One of the biggest reasons couples get into arguments is because one or both think they are smarter than the other. They have better ideas. They understand more clearly. They know how to drive better, cook better, make financial decisions better, plan better. The desire for preeminence fuels much of the conflict in marriage and family relations. It creates problems at work and in churches too. We often call this a battle of the wills, but it is just two people who each think, "I know more than the other one". My wife and I once got into an argument before we were married over how to pronounce the constellation Orion. What set Mary Jo off was that I laughed at her pronunciation as if she was not quite as educated and bright as me.

One of the great statements on relationship found anywhere is in the Bible. James, the brother of Jesus had this to say. **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) All relationships develop in the midst of differences. Here James is talking about the separation between the rich and poor but anything and everything can stretch us apart. Even identical twins who have grown up together are different in some way or another and those differences create the ground for splintering of the relationship. We use the term "opposites attract" but it really is not the case. We tend to be attracted to those who are more like us than different. Generally it's the case that "birds of a feather flock together". Despite the tendency to want to find those most like us for close friendships, there are still differences that can spring up and create division.

That brings us to the seventh law of relationship. Everyone is better than you. It may seem like this is grounded in a feeling of low self-esteem but that is not the case at all. Let me share the verse in the Bible that lays out for us this seventh law of relationship. The Apostle Paul wrote, **Not one thing according to divisiveness nor according to empty conceit but with a humble mindset constantly esteeming one another being greater than ourselves.** (Philippians 2: 3) We constantly are comparing ourselves to others, whether we like that in us or not. It is human nature. Here is a list of possible points of comparison: looks, intelligence, strength, creativity, education, income, popularity, personality traits. Which of these points of comparison are you most likely to evaluate yourself with others? I recently saw a video where the interviewer had in studio a young social media celebrity. The host bragged that he had over 4 million followers on Twitter. The teenager responded by complimenting the interviewer about his popularity. She then smiled gently and told him she had more than 20 million followers. We can't help comparing ourselves to others! Sometimes it comes out favorably, other times we are disappointed by how we measure up with someone else. Paul insists

that in all our relationships, we are to do away with making such evaluations and just see those around us as better.

I admit that is not the way we are taught to think, and it certainly is not how we naturally exist, but it is the best way to be in relationships. The goal remember is to avoid divisiveness, the destructive splitting apart of friendships, marriages, and communities. The humble mindset makes that possible. There are three relationship traps to avoid and three steps to take if you are going to develop the relationship success model of the Bible. Here are three traps. Try not make yourself the police officer or the teacher by building your relationship on correction. The infamous backseat driver is a relationship killer. Teachers, supervisors, and foremen have jobs to do but when you bring those traits into a marriage or friendship, the relationship will sour quickly. Try to avoid the trap of being the "expert" in your relationships. What you think you know may just need to be kept to yourself. The second relationship trap is covetousness. King Saul lost his mind over the popularity his young general David enjoyed. David became a pop icon at a young age. His success on the battlefield led to the women as they welcomed back the victorious soldiers, chanting, **"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."** (1 Samuel 18: 7b NIV) Saul's jealousy ruined what could have been a wonderful friendship. **Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.** (1 Samuel 18: 8-9 NIV) How many beautiful relationships have fallen on hard times because at least one person is jealous of what the other has: popularity, attention, success. Covetousness is a poison to the soul and must be crushed when it is discovered in you. Closely tied to covetousness is competition. The impressiveness in others can inspire you to try to become better but never let it corrupt your heart by wanting to beat them. Competition is a necessary part of sports, business, and politics but it is deadly in a marriage, a friendship, or a family. Don't strive to beat others; try to be inspired and inspiring so excellence can be shared and celebrated.

Here are the three steps to relationship success. Genuine appreciation. Develop a genuine appreciation of the skills and abilities of others. Pay attention to what those you are around do well. Jonathon, who had every right to be jealous of the success and popularity of his friend David, instead, developed an awe of David's qualities. When Jonathan's father, King Saul wanted David dead because he saw David as a threat to the throne, Jonathon, the rightful heir to the crown gave David genuine praise. He confirmed his natural leadership skills and ability to lead their nation. **"Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."** (1 Samuel 23: 17 NIV) The second step to relationship success is gratefulness. Gratitude is a key to being great in relationships. When you find others who are grateful and express their gratitude, you will gravitate toward them. They develop lifelong marriages, lifelong friendships. The Apostle Paul brought his letter to the Romans to a close with a number of expressions of gratitude. Here is one. **Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.** (Romans 16: 3-4 NIV) The third step to relationship success is this. Have a generous response to mistakes and sins. Solomon puts the third step this way. **A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.** (Proverbs 19:11 NIV) Relationship success stories have this in common. The unwillingness to let failures dictate how the marriage or friendship goes. Moses, who was called the humblest man in the world faced the wicked sinfulness of the Israelites over and over again. There must have been many times when he was infuriated over their terrible ways grievous corruption, Moses went all out in his attempt to gain a pardon from God. **I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.** (Deuteronomy 9: 25-26 NIV) Never settle for relationship mediocrity. Pursue God's very best in every friendship, family relationship and bond of love God has given you. May the love of Christ bless you with joyous and fulfilling relationships!