

Vital relationships: Being connected to God

Sermon for Sunday, February 11, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 4:5-42

Today I'm starting a new series of sermons on building relationships with others. Over the coming weeks, we'll hear what God's Word says about relationships with friends, in marriage, in families, with difficult people, and more. Today's message is about the most vital of all our relationships: our relationship with God.

Before we get into that, though, let's take a minute or two to build relationships here in church. In a moment, I'm going to ask you to get up and say hi to someone else. But let's not do the square dance we usually do, where you go from one person to the next. Whomever you connect with, stay with that person. Ask something like, "What was special for you this past week?" It could be something good or something bad. Really listen to one another.

After they've had a good chance to do that, say, "Stop! Look around – who's missing? Who do you sometimes see at church, but that person isn't here today? Write down their names on your bulletin. Later today, give them a phone call. You're not the attendance police asking, "Where were you this morning? You weren't at church!" Instead, you're part of the church family: "I missed you this morning at church. Is everything alright?"

Now ask your partner, "The very first Sunday you came to this church, what was your reason for coming?" I'm not talking about why you *kept* coming; just simply, "Why did you come that very first Sunday?"

Take a minute right now to do that. Each of you should get a turn to tell your reason.

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Now I'll do a little survey of your answers. How many said:

- I came with my parents when I was growing up
- Someone invited me to come
- I saw the ad in the newspaper
- I saw the sign out front
- I was just curious
- Other?

When they've done this survey in other churches, those first two items are usually the top two. And in some

churches, "someone invited me" accounts for 90% of the people.

My goal in this message today is to encourage you to make a commitment to invite someone new to come with you to church next Sunday. In fact, at the end of this message, I'm going to ask you to stand up with me, as a sign that you are making that commitment. So for the next few minutes, while you're thinking about what I'm saying, the back part of your brain can be thinking, "Whom could I invite to church?"

But first I need to answer the question: "Why would I want to invite someone to come to church?" I'm looking at the passage of Scripture in John 4:5-42. Jesus meets a woman drawing water from a well. Jesus asks her for a drink, which opens up a conversation about water and being thirsty. Jesus finally says, "I've got some water you can have – if you drink it, you'll never be thirsty again."

Of course, she's intrigued by this. She more or less says, "Give me some of this spiritual Gatorade."

But then Jesus does a 180 degree turn. He turns the conversation to her love life; he says, "Go and get your husband." However, she doesn't have a husband; she's living common law with some guy. This places her in danger: a strict rabbi in those days could order that she and the man be killed for sexual immorality.

So she doesn't lie, but she doesn't tell the whole truth, either. She says, "I don't have a husband."

How many of you have ever done that? You've got into some kind of trouble, and you are giving your side of the story. You don't exactly lie, but you tell the story to make yourself look as good as possible. I've done that; anyone else here done that?

Here's a glimpse of the divinity of Jesus: he's never met her before, and yet he knows all about her. Jesus says to her, "You have had five husbands, and the man you live with now is not your husband." She's astonished that he knows all this. But the really astonishing thing is what else happens: Jesus still offers her eternal life. Despite her sinful life, he still reveals himself as the Messiah, God's Saviour, and offers her this living water.

Item One: She experiences Jesus and his grace: she receives forgiveness and love which she doesn't deserve.

If you've experienced Jesus and his forgiveness and his love, you know what I'm talking about. It's the most incredible, wonderful experience in the world.

If you've never experienced that, you literally don't know what you're missing. You know something's missing, but maybe you've never been able to put your finger on it.

Everyone hungers for grace or forgiveness. There's a story from Spain about a father and son who exchanged angry words—the kind of words which are spoken without thinking, and then you think of nothing else from then on. The son ran away from home. The father was filled with regret and heartache and went searching for his son. He travelled for months all over the country, but to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a newspaper in Madrid, the major city of Spain. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."

By twelve noon on Saturday, there were over 800 young men named Paco in front of the newspaper building.

Forgiveness and love is something which all of us hunger for. Jesus is the answer to that need.

Let's go on.

After this, the woman goes back into the village, and starts telling everyone what happened to her. In verse 39 she says, "He told me everything I ever did!"

Can you just see some of the guys in the village, with their eyes growing wide? ... "*Everything?!!*"

And her nodding with wide eyes. "Yes – everything! But he forgives me for it all!"

"All of it?"

"All of it!"

Item One: she experience Jesus forgiveness and love. That led to:

Item Two: she was so excited she had to tell others the good news.

Jesus offers each one of us forgiveness for all that we've done wrong. Are you excited about that? Now if you've never experienced Jesus and his love, you have nothing to talk about. But if you have, you've got the greatest news in the world.

There was one more thing she did, something that we can do as well.

Item Three: She invited them to come and find out for themselves.

They probably had questions she couldn't answer. But she knew that if they met Jesus, that would change everything. In verse 29 she says, "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did!"

Do you sometimes wish you could talk to your friends about what Jesus means to you, but you're afraid to because you don't know to answer their questions? Maybe you just get all tongue-tied.

You can do what she did: invite them to come and see for themselves. Invite them to come to church with you. Experience what it's like to worship God. When people talk with God, sing to God, listen to the truth of God's word, and just are open to the Holy Spirit to touch their lives—there's something about that which is beyond words. You can simply say to your friends, "Why not come and see for yourself?"

That's it: just three simple steps:

- 1) Experience Jesus and his forgiveness and love
- 2) Tell someone else about it
- 3) Invite them to come and see for themselves.

A few minutes ago, I asked the question, "Who's missing?" We looked around and saw people that are sometimes here, but not here today. But there are still more people missing. I'm thinking now about people who have never come to church, this one or any other – or least not for a good many years. They are missing out on the greatest part of life, knowing Jesus and his forgiveness and love. Think about your neighbours... your friends... your coworkers. What would it be like if you said to one of them, "Would you like to come with me to my church next Sunday morning? It's meant a lot to me, and you might like it, too."

I'm going to ask you to do four things:

- 1) Think of someone you'd like to invite to come to church with you.
- 2) Write down the name of that person(s).
- 3) Pray for that person – right now, take a moment to do that.
- 4) Are you really going to go and speak to that person, and invite him or her to come to church with you? I'm asking you to make a visible sign of your commitment to do this, by standing up with me.

(For those of you reading this at home: you can do this, too! Think of someone. Write down their name. Pray for him or her, right now. And then stand up, right where you are.)