

Generational Relationships Matter to God

From generation to generation, God has used relationships to share His great plans for our lives. He created man and woman with a desire to build a relationship with man and provide a future for each of us. God still longs to show His love and plans to anyone who will turn to Him. When God asked me to start the on-line ministry of Naomi2Ruth Connection, the word connection seemed to have an important significance. We learned how God worked through Naomi, in spite of her many struggles and bitterness at the time, to love Ruth and change generations to come. In fact, our Savior became our redeemer through this line. Ruth loved her mother-in-law and left her past to obediently care for her and follow her direction. God showed His love for them in providing a redeemer. God uses imperfect people who become usable for His glory. He has provided a redeemer to us today. Our decisions affect not only our lives, but it can affect generations to come.

I am so grateful for my relationship with Him. I cherish my time with Him, but sometimes God seems to like to use the middle of the night to speak to me. (I think it may be the time he can best get my attention). As I was struggling to get back to sleep one night, I got up and watched a short video on my phone. A lady who had just lost her husband was sharing that she found a very important document on one of her husband's devices. It was entitled, "What I want to teach my children." Of course, it was a tear-jerker for her, as well as for me, as I listened to her share a very small portion of the 8 page that document her husband had been writing. It started with "EVERYTHING in life should revolve around your relationship with the Lord. Your path should always begin there." Since it is many hours later that I am writing this, I may not recall every exact word, but I certainly remember the basic words. I repeated it in my head many times as I laid back in bed. She definitely emphasized that the word EVERYTHING was capitalized.

As I concentrated on her words, I knew that it was what I would have wanted to share with my family also, but also know that I missed the mark in so many ways. I am grateful for the opportunity to see our grown children and their families carry on the importance of God in their lives, but I wish I had done more to help them have a much deeper relationship with the Lord early in life. I was very blessed to have a husband that followed His calling into ministry. Together we strived to teach our children God's principles. He always said our goal was to teach them as we walk together according to Deuteronomy 6:7, so we strived to share the importance of giving their lives to God and to live for Him. We also had our failures and times of not being victorious throughout many physical, financial, emotional and spiritual battles. They definitely also saw our times of failing to meet our goals throughout some of those struggles. God reminded me that His Word also shared the many failures of some of His most loved Bible characters. Our success and failures in life are part of building our relationship with God and our children. The couple on the video seemed to have a common goal of what they wanted to teach their children. Many couples don't make that a priority. Taking our families to church is very important, but it is not enough. Today's society teaches us that parenting is just about raising healthy successful children. While that may be important. A successful goal to God is raising children to learn to love God and join us in Heaven someday. We can't totally control their lives, but we can make sure that we faithfully obey God and give our children to God for guidance. We can also make sure we remember to appreciate and praise them for their efforts to grow spiritually and excel in other areas of life.

The relationship between parents and children is certainly one of the most exciting gifts God has given us. While they are young children require constant attention to meet their needs. Do you remember how you praised every little thing they did? We also felt like hero's when they wanted to spend time with us. As they grow older, our responsibilities become more complicated. We still love them just as much, but there is a new process of meeting their needs. God planned for them to learn to become more independent so that they will learn how to mature and become more self-sufficient. In these years, they begin to question everything. Our hero status seems to diminish. Learning to let go is a process of asking for God's wisdom, providing guidance and setting boundaries. This is where we pray that they will especially learn to turn to God for their guidance. Our responsibility becomes more limited, but we have to learn to commit them to God. Our relationship with God becomes key to our relationship to our teens in this crucial time of their lives. We need God's direction on how to guide them and to try to keep a good relationship so that they know that they can trust us to show love and care even when we don't understand what they are going through. They still need us, but the relationship can become strained, or it can actually deepen in this time if we can build a common goal with God and our child. Trust plays a key role between God and our child as well as how our child learns to trust God and us as a parent. Each child will challenge us in different ways. We suddenly realize how much we need to keep our relationship with the Lord stronger than ever, both as an example, and as our foundation for wisdom. God loves His family even more than we love them. He knows what is best for us, and if He were to give us personal instructions like this father did, He would say the same thing that this man shared, Everything in life should pivot around our relationship with Him. In fact, He already has. It is called the Bible. The main theme of His Word is to teach us about His Love and desire to build a relationship with us. Through His Son, we have been given a direct line to the Father when we confess our sins and invite Him to become the Lord of our lives. He already paid the price for our sin so we can become His adopted children and learn to walk with Him. This is certainly the most important relationship we can experience.

So how do we learn to build relationships? The most important relationship starts by realizing how much God loves us and deciding to accept His free gift of salvation. Since we were born with sin, (Romans 3:23), we need to ask for the forgiveness for our sin that God provided to us through His Son, Jesus when He did on the cross to pay the price for our sin (Romans 6:23)). We make Him Lord of our lives by submitting ourselves to Him daily. Each day we discover how much we can trust Him to show His love toward us for our good and His glory. This is the most important relationship we will ever have. But God also gave us examples of various relationships through which we can learn to grow closer to Him.

One of the most intimate experiences God uses is marriage. Through it, we get a glimpse of what it means to not only deeply love someone else, but it shows us that we greatly benefit by learning to commit ourselves to someone unselfishly. Through it we can see ourselves as someone else sees us (both the good and not good). It gives us an opportunity to change things that may be self-centered. As we recognize our need to look beyond our own wants and feelings, God is waiting to provide any forgiveness needed, and to provide all the resources we need to make any changes or to put Him in charge of our feelings and circumstances. Sometimes we need to humbly and sincerely say the important words of "I'm sorry". Learning to ask for forgiveness and to forgive our spouses' failures (even when they don't ask for it) is vital.

I was thrilled when God called my husband, Doug, into the ministry. Together, we thoroughly enjoyed reaching out to people with the gospel and watching God change lives. My husband always made me feel loved and an important part of God's calling on our lives. I was always in awe of how God used Him and what I learned by just being a part of what God was doing through Him.

The last few years of marriage, however, held some extra struggles with sickness and maybe even some depression. Knowing God's answers to His life kept my husband grounded, but he was also very honest about the times that he questioned God's will for him. He strongly believed in healing, but God chose not to heal him here on earth. Sometimes God reminded me that I needed to play the role of Aaron who had to lift up the arms of Moses when he got too weak. I still cherished how God used these times to draw us closer to Him and each other in spite of tougher days. We had seen so many miracles. How could we let the enemy weaken our faith? Doug always reminded me that we have to live by faith, not by sight. We had to live by what we know, not by what we feel at the time. But what was God trying to teach us now? Any lack of trust was a tactic of Satan to discourage us. Doug was known to remind people that all doubt, or desire to want our own way was rooted in the original sin of pride. We obviously had to admit that we weren't always successful in conquering our pride or lack of trust either, but God is faithful. Sometimes it truly felt like a sacrifice to praise God when we didn't feel like it. I am so grateful that we were able to build our relationship in Christ and each other through the great times and the tough times. It would have been easier to scold each other for not living up to what we taught, but sometimes we just had to quietly commit ourselves to each other and to God. Wives need to feel loved, cherished and appreciated. Husbands need to feel needed, respected, appreciated. Husbands have a great responsibility of leading the family. God holds him responsible for spiritual leadership. Wives are given the responsibility to be a helpmate who supports and lifts up her husband. Together they are given the task of raising children for God. God only holds us responsible for our calling. So even if the partner does not fulfil their role, we need to make sure that we are doing our part by strengthening our relationship with God and doing what we can to be what God wants us to be. When a family is divided, it is much more challenging, but this is what God designed the gift of marriage to be.

Before my husband became more unable to officially minister, he was a great marriage counselor. We always appreciated how God taught us about our relationship with him through the gift of intimacy in marriage. It is God's gift to teach us how to thoroughly enjoy love through closeness, communication, and common purpose. At first, it seems we see mostly great things in our spouse as we are enthralled with each other and our new relationship. We see almost nothing but good in each other and want to please each other in everything we do. Unfortunately, over time we can easily get discouraged if things don't seem as exciting as they once were. Sometimes life's challenges become overwhelming. We can become comfortable with sharing our negative emotions and we aren't as sensitive to how we may hurt each other. It is easy to forget to apologize when we have caused pain. When our spouse hurts us, we naturally want to sulk or lash out in revenge. These are the moments that God wants us to learn to die to self and give our hurts to God as well as work to heal our relationship with our spouse. These are also the things that God uses to teach us about our nature that God wants to make more like Him. God uses our spouses to show us areas that need to make us more beautiful, like a diamond that becomes more precious after impurities have been chipped away. Sometimes we also neglect making those little efforts that we

used to make to show our love. If we don't constantly work at building our relationship and nurturing our love and appreciation of each other, we can become self-centered and dwell on our own feelings. Sometimes we start to keep score of what our partner did or didn't say or do correctly to meet our expectations. Suddenly we see each other's shortcomings more than the qualities we once liked. Our expectations often change. We think our spouse is supposed to make us happy rather than asking God how to concentrate on becoming the spouse that our spouse needs. We forget that this is the person that God gave us to love and encourage. Our goal should be "How can I see my spouse and love them as God loves them? What does God want me to see in them that others may not? How can God meet their needs through me?"

During one of the first sessions that my husband would have with couples would be to let them initially share their feelings and frustrations. One of the questions he would ask them is what drew them to each other initially. It was amazing how often they could no longer even remember any good qualities. So part of their homework was to daily spend time with God and to ask God to show them something each day that they could appreciate about each other. This was to continue throughout their many counseling sessions. They were then to start sharing with each other some of those specific things that they can appreciate. As their relationship with God grew, and their appreciation for each other grew, God was able to change their hearts and teach them a new perspective. They could soon begin to see what God was doing in their lives. Then he would give them homework. The first session's homework would be to read Psalms 139 concentrating on how we are each fearfully and wonderfully made and designed before we were even born. God had a plan for each of us from the beginning. As they built a new partnership controlled by God, they could share new goals and feel more fulfillment through their relationship with God and each other. We used to have a picture of a triangle on our bedroom door that showed us that if one of us is on the bottom left and one is on the bottom right with God at the top of the triangle, we would be reminded that the closer we each get to God the closer we each get to each other. It is great to become more comfortable with each other but sometimes we get disappointed when we suddenly aren't getting all the special attention we gave each other at first. The real growth comes as we deepen our hearts in alignment with each other no matter what the circumstances. Our ability to love and build trust grows as we intimately share our hearts and appreciate our growing relationship. It is always important to at least occasionally include ways to make each other feel special and wonderfully loved. Sometimes our relationship is tested, It takes a constant effort to build a relationship in which we learn to trust and appreciate each other. By each individual recognizing their responsibility to draw closer to God, they could work toward healing their relationship. Many marriages were renewed, even if only one spouse made the extra effort. Sometimes we have to get out of God's way so God can do His part. We are only responsible for our obedience to God. Only God can change our spouse. If unfaithfulness or abuse has occurred, separation may be necessary. God still loves us and will guide us as we continue to trust Him for direction no matter what we are facing. He promises wisdom when we ask. Marriage as well as raising a family is a great gift to teach us to love deeply and think beyond ourselves. We quickly recognize our weaknesses and our need for God's strength and guidance. We can't control our spouses and we have limited control of our children, but we can make sure that we obediently give God control of our lives. As we walk in praise to God, our attitude of gratitude shows up more easily to our spouses and our children also.

As a pastor, Doug was always conscious of the tremendous responsibility he had beyond being a good husband and father. God holds pastors responsible for letting the Holy Spirit use him to correctly share His Word and shepherd His sheep. He needed to be a good example as well as speak truth according to God's Word, even if it wasn't popular. As a congregation, we often aren't aware of the many ways that God tries to destroy or discourage the one that boldly spreads the gospel. Satan is very threatened by such leadership. Spiritual warfare begins at the top. Doug was very conscious of the war going on around him. So many churches are destroyed because of Satan's efforts to destroy the leadership of a church. We all need to be on guard and fight the battle as soldiers of the King. Our relationship with our pastor and God's people is a very important key to how God's love is shared. Pastors really need the congregations to support them through prayer, encouragement. There are many ways that God calls us to show our love and appreciation for them. The church is sanctuary in which God and His people are called to come before His presence to worship and adore our Lord. Joining small groups are a great way to enjoy fellowship. Our women's group is presently studying Trust. It is an important part of our relationship with God as well as in relationships. The men's group is also growing and a blessing to many. Together we develop relationships for God's glory. Acts 2 teaches us that many souls are saved by the way that we allow the Holy Spirit to share His love with others.

Our relationship with God also depends on our daily efforts to grow closer to Him and learn to develop an attitude of gratitude. As we spend time with our Lord, and make the effort to get closer to God, we learn to appreciate what He is doing in our lives. He is/has everything we need to live a very fulfilling life here on earth. We can quickly learn that we can trust Him to carry us through every circumstance if we put our full faith in Him. God sometimes allows us to go through testing, but through it He can show His faithfulness as we learn to turn our hearts to Him. I have learned that the sooner I learn to praise Him in spite of the circumstances, the sooner God can lift my spirit into His realm of peace and comfort of knowing that I can trust Him to work all things out for His glory and my good (even if it isn't the good that I was looking for). It is a relationship that never ends. We get to spend eternity with Jesus as well as see our loved ones someday if they belonged to Him also.

Our worship team recently shared a picture of someone walking on a path of boards in the middle of a sandy beach. The picture only showed the feet but on a short piece of the path. Nothing was visible ahead. Sand was on each side of the walkway. Our theme for the morning was on trust. My daughter shared that trust was about not seeing beyond that short piece of the path. God can see up ahead. Our job is to trust Him. As we learn to walk with Him and keep our eyes on Him our path becomes enlightened. If we take our eyes off of Him, however, or easily get distracted by our own thoughts and feelings, we can easily fall into sinking sand. This is where we can lose our way and possibly get so deep into that sand of discouragement or depression that we can't see anything but sand. Others can be helpful when they come along side of us and try to take our hand, but the only one that can truly pull us out of that sinking sand and put us back on the right path is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is when we raise our hands in praise to Him and get our eyes back on the light of Jesus that the darkness of our surroundings can be broken. He is always ready to take our hands and lift us up to where we belong in Him. Our relationship with God holds the key to all relationships. It should be the goal for EVERYTHING in our path. In fact, our relationships in parenting, marriage, and

as a church body greatly benefits from how we trust Jesus and praise Him through all circumstances. No one is immune. We all fail in so many areas of our relationships. Just like we need to start with asking forgiveness from God, we still need to be mindful that it is a daily struggle to meet the goal of a better relationship others, especially family. Humbly seeing our failures, asking forgiveness, if necessary, and renewing our goals can make a huge difference.

God's word is filled with generations of those who followed God as well as those who faced severe punishment because they did not seek or obey God. My heart still aches for a few family members who are not following God like they once did. I am so glad that I am still here to pray for them. It is my primary responsibility to love them and pray for them to restore their relationship with God as well as to pray for those who may not know Him yet.

So it starts with us, but we need to examine our relationship with Christ, with our spouse, our parents, our children and even our church. No matter what your situation is, God wants you to become a vessel of His love. We can each start by making sure that we are walking faithfully with Him and loving others as He loves them. God gives us many keys to grow closer to Him and others. Our connections from generation to generation have been God's plan since He created man. We each have an awesome opportunity to be a major part of changing a generation through family and those God puts in our path. It is up to us. Do you accept the mission? Our days are numbered. Only what we do for Christ will last. Who is depending on you? I hope the following verses speak to your heart as you ask God where He wants you to seek Him more fully.

Walking with Jesus in Trust and Praise

Ps 37:5 - Commit thy way unto the Lord, **trust** also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.

Ps. 89:12 - I will **praise** thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

Hebrews 13:15-By Him therefore let us offer the **sacrifice of praise** to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips **giving thanks** to His name.

1 Peter 1:7 -That the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, through it be tried with fire, might be found unto **praise and honour and glory** at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Marriage-Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might ^[g]sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, ^[h]of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

Parenting

Deuteronomy 6:7-And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down. And when thou riseth up.