

Session 11: Relating to Others

Matthew 22:37-40: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Objective: To understand our roles and responsibilities in relationships so that we can grow together in Christ

Truth: As a disciple of Christ we must assume responsibility for our own character and seek to meet the needs of others rather than the other way round.

Review last session:

1. How did it go as you worked through your 'Freedom Plan'? Is there an area of your life where you feel you are slowing /quickly on the road to maturity?
2. Were you able to tell the stories of Peter to anyone? If so, how did it go?

New Material:

1. Read Matthew 22:37-40, the objective and the truth together.

Philemon & Onesimus

To set the scene – Philemon was a Christian who lived in Colosse. Onesimus was Philemon's slave. He ran away from Philemon and became a Christian. He met Paul, who became a 'father in faith' to him. The letter of Philemon was sent from Paul to Philemon at the same time as Paul wrote to the church in Colosse (Colossians). One other thing to note, Onesimus' name means 'useless'!

Based on NLT

Philemon 7-16

You love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people. That is why I am boldly asking a favour of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me ... I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

Philemon 17-21

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul write this with my own hand: I will repay it and I wouldn't mention that you owe me your very soul! Yes, my brother, please do me this favour for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

Now retell this story in your own words...

Questions for Discussion: (Just ask the questions that didn't get covered when you 'retold' the story. Feel free to omit any questions that don't seem relevant to your situation or that feel redundant.)

1. *What do you like about this story?*
2. *Is there anything that bothered you about this story?*
3. *What do these stories show you about God?*
 - a. *Why did Paul send Onesimus back to Philemon? Was that the right thing to do?*
4. *What do these stories show you about people?*
 - a. *What sort of relationship was Paul expecting Philemon to have with Onesimus when he returned?*
 - b. *What is our responsibility towards other people?*
 - c. *Why do we tend to judge others and look out for our own needs?*
 - d. *What do Godly relationships look like?*
5. *How do the truths in this story apply to your life?*
 - a. *Have you experienced a time when authority figures have demanded action from you without first affirming and checking with you? How did you respond to them?*
 - b. *How do you tend to react to situations and people, as a parent or in church life?*

To Take Away

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to prompt you in areas of your relationships which need you to change how you act or think. This isn't a time of condemnation, but an opportunity for freedom.

2. Meditate on the following Scripture passages:

- 1 John 4:10 – We love because He first loved us
- Matthew 10:8 – We give freely because we have received freely
- Luke 6:36 – We are merciful because He has been merciful to us
- Ephesians 4:32 – We forgive in the same way that Jesus has forgiven us
- Philippians 2:3-5 – Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interest, but take an interest in others, too.

Note: There are times when regardless of what you do, you are constantly being wronged or abused. Then it is right to seek help and advice and to (probably) remove yourself from that relationship. And remember, we have a God who can bring healing and wholeness to us and those around us.