

Relationships Roundtable

Mart: Let's talk about relationships. I've got to tell you something. When I was in the third grade, I remember this, you know what I wanted to be when I grew up?

Joe: I have no idea. Tell us Mart.

Mart: I wanted to be a forest ranger. A forest ranger.

Joe: So you at an early age already didn't like people and wanted to live in your tower by yourself out there.

Mart: Loved animals. I loved being out in the woods. I loved, you know, tracking . . .

Larry: Let's spend the whole time exploring this. This is interesting by the way.

Joe: This is kind of like when my wife says, the more I get to know people the more I love my dog.

Mart: But it's true, isn't it? We come into life with varying degrees of interest in relationships and with varying degrees of success, and some of us don't do very well with relationships. Some of us can look back and say, you know, it's like all the people I know and don't want to have to be around anymore or who don't want to be around me anymore.

Notes:

Joe: But can you punt like that Mart? Isn't it true we're built as relational beings, so if I say I just want to be a forest ranger or whatever; I want to live in isolation, isn't there some conflict there since we're wired to be relational?

Mart: It can go both ways, can't it? Some people have to be around people all the time. They're not happy unless they've got somebody in the house with them, right?

Joe: People energize them, yeah.

Mart: And you can be . . . can't people be really healthy and alone?

Joe: For how long? I think that's the point.

Mart: What do you think?

Joe: I don't think for a long time. I think we need each other and I think that since we're wired for relationships God's given us the gift of communication; he's given us the gift of touch; he's given us the gift of others around us that I'm an incurable, unrepentant people person.

Mart: Are you?

Joe: I am.

Notes:

Mart: That's you.

Joe: I am. It drives a lot of people crazy but even people people get peopled out. There are times I feel like I just have to be alone, all by myself, but I can't live like that. I don't think anybody can live like that. And the issue is once I've walked back into relationship world, it's the managing of relationships, isn't it? Not the issue of relationships that is really key.

Mart: Okay now Larry, you've, as a counselor, you've kind of hung out your shingle I think on the . . .

Larry: Some years ago.

Mart: . . . on relationships as well, right? I mean you've thought a lot about healthy relationships.

Larry: Because the definition of a person is a person in community. A person outside of community is no longer a person. Personhood is defined by relationality because we bear the image of a relational God. The Father would not be the Father if it weren't for the Son. The Son would not be a Son without his Father. The Spirit is the spirit of their relationship, so final reality is relational. Final reality is interdependence. Final reality is relational connection; so when I think about the image of God, I think about relationships. Does that mean that we should never

Notes:

be alone? Of course not. Bonhoeffer has a wonderful sentence: If you're drawn toward silence and solitude, enter community. If you're drawn toward community, enter silence and solitude. The point is find the balance because silence and solitude, biblically speaking, is relationship with God. It's the intimacy with the Father, Son, and Spirit. One of the most important books I read was John Owen's *Communion With God* where he talks about I can have a relationship with the Father that's different than my relationship with the Son. I can have a relationship with the Son that's different than the relationship with the Father or the Spirit. Each person of the Trinity. I can relate to you, Mart, in a way different than I relate to Joe. You're both friends. I love you both but it's different being with the two of you and when I enter into silence and solitude, I'm wanting to relate to the Father, Son, and Spirit, but the degree to which I relate to the Father, Son, and Spirit is the degree to which I'm going to come out and want to relate to you.

Mart: Okay so let's say I'm not where you are, obviously, and I come into your office, I come to the table and I say guys, I don't like people. In fact if my dog dies, I grieve over the death of my dog. People die; people die.

Larry: Big deal.

Mart: Yeah. What would you . . . where would you begin? Where would you push me? Pastor, counselor?

Notes:

Larry: First thing I'd ask is why did you come? If you're happy with that I presume you don't need my help.

Mart: Well my wife sent me, Larry.

Larry: Do you care what your wife thinks?

Mart: I have to.

Larry: Why? You don't care about people. Tell them to take a hike.

Mart: I can't tell my wife to take a hike.

Larry: Sure you can. You can divorce her. What's the matter with them?

Mart: I can't afford to divorce her, Larry. My community doesn't believe that that's the way to go.

Larry: And what your community believes matters to you? Because somehow you believe it as well. If you want to escape fully from relationships, you don't need my help. You're doing fine but there's something within you that longs for a level of relationality that you have never tasted, and I would guess the roots are rather deep. Tell me your story. I would want to know

Notes:

what happened to you as a child. I'd begin talking about that and I would begin talking with you in such a way that I would find, because I know I would find, because this is just truth. This is not just the Bible says; it's that the Bible does say, therefore it's truth that you were wired for relationships, so it's 100 percent right. We bear the image of a relational God; therefore I know that you're relational, that your hungry for relationships, and if you deny it, I know it's been blocked. It isn't that it's not there. There's been some way it's been twisted. It's been torn apart. It's been a source of terror, a source of rage. Something is going on there to block your urge toward relationship and that's what I would be looking for.

Mart: Okay . . .

Joe: If you found it Larry, what would you do with it? Does he need to go back? Let's say there's been some traumatic event in his family when he was five.

Larry: Maybe his family was divorced when he was five years old and his dad never talked to him since.

Joe: Right, does he need to go back, confront his dad? Are we talking about going back and unscrambling the egg, which is, in my book, often an impossible thing to do because I can't control . . .

Notes:

Larry: But that's how a therapist's been making a living for 20 years of working with that.

Joe: That's what I love about you, because what does he do today since his dad doesn't even want to talk to him still?

Larry: Or maybe his dad is dead so there's no way to go back to his father and to deal with that kind of a thing. But I would go back, as I believe and would want to say a thousand times over, I would want to go back to childhood difficulties, not to unscramble it, not to heal it, but to understand what's happening in him today that perhaps when your father left you at age five, if that were your story, and he never talked to you since, and then he committed suicide two weeks ago—let's make it as bad as we can—if all that were going on in your life, I would want to know how that has affected your soul. I would want to know how that has changed the way you choose to relate to people to protect yourself from ever reliving that kind of pain. So I'm going to detach from people as much as I can to protect my soul from ever experiencing that kind of pain. Then I would say, so your goal is to avoid pain in life.

Mart: Okay, so what if I say to you then and you're making me very uncomfortable right now, this is our first session. This is our last session, Larry, Dr. Crabb. I'm going to go to my pastor.

Larry: Well, do understand that might not be my opening

Notes:

comment if you came into my office.

Mart: Cause what if I just said I don't want to go there. I'll go to the pastor. Teach me the Bible.

Larry: And because I respect the freedom that you have to make your choices, I would simply clarify the choice you're making. I wouldn't persuade you to stay with me. I would say that, let me tell you what I would say. I would say that if what you really, really want is to avoid any kind of suffering and to make sure that your pain level is completely down, then my sentence to you is, you're never going to experience the joy of being alive as a human being. Now if that's what you want to do to avoid all pain and never enter into relationships then I'm not your man and if you find a pastor who will cooperate with that you've found a lousy pastor.

Mart: Okay, well, let me ask the pastor, Joe you're in the community and you've overheard this conversation. Are you comfortable with what the counselor just told me?

Joe: I'm very comfortable with it. You wouldn't find a lot of other things from me because . . .

Mart: You're kidding?

Joe: No. I believe that God's created us for relationships that

Notes:

the fullness of life is born out of healthy relationships. That you being the person God wants you to be and that you really long to be down deep in your heart . . .

Larry: That's the key.

Joe: . . . needs to be in relationships that . . .

Larry: Because you bear the image of God.

Joe: Yeah and I would just say you are really resisting God's purpose in your life. You're not resisting your dad and what happened back there, although that's what simulated it. You are resisting God's design in your life and I want to help you experience that. Now if I could . . . can I just switch this a little bit?

Larry: Sure.

Joe: There are a lot of people that feel like Mart, and Mart, maybe Larry and I will spend a lot of time helping you, you know, at some point. You know, it's a lot of us that feel like that. There's a flip side to this and that is those of us who are hungry for relationships, who love relationships, and who end of getting into train wrecks all the time in relationships, and move from one relationship to another, and it's a whole series of train wrecks in our lives and we're disillusioned. And what about that

Notes:

kind of a person who has found that their hunger has led to deep disappointment?

Mart: I'm glad you went there because that's where I wanted to go next. You get in too close. Okay, so what about the person who just is so absolutely obsessed with relationships. They can't stand to be alone. They can't be with themselves.

Larry: They're not obsessed with relationships. They're obsessed with manipulating people for their own ends and that's got nothing to do with relationship.

Mart: And you're saying that's behind the train wrecks then?

Larry: Of course. Because the deepest desire in the regenerate human soul, the deepest desire that lies in potential in every image bearing soul is not to be loved; the deepest desire is to love because that's the image of God. God's a lover.

Mart: Say that again. Say that again what . . .

Larry: The deepest desire in the regenerate human soul is not to be loved. That's the deepest need in the human soul to be loved, but the deepest desire is to love. Now when I move toward relationship, out of my desire to love you as opposed to maneuver you to get you to give me what I need, that's where the train wreck happens. So the person that's obsessed with relationships

Notes:

is obsessed with himself not with relationships.

Mart: Okay, go ahead.

Joe: I think of the woman at the well in John chapter 4. Here Jesus encounters this marginalized woman and we think she's this immoral Samaritan woman. She has been hungry for relationships. She has been through five husbands, five train wrecks and then Jesus meets her at the well and gives her a whole different paradigm that she has a hunger in her soul that's deeper than this and he brings himself to her. Now what I see in Jesus, in terms of relationships, is not manipulation or power leveraging for his own gain but rather a love that serves. You know, love has a lot of facets to it and I think you're . . . I just applaud what Larry says that love is what we give to a relationship not manipulation and what are the facets of that love. One is serving. That when Jesus came into my life, he came in to serve me to meet my needs, to enhance me; and when I walk into a relationship, do I come in to serve you? Is that the kind of love and that's the kind of thing that begets servant back because as I love you like that you'll be stimulated to love me back like that. So I think what we're saying is that relationships can't be all about me and what you're doing for me, but healthy relationships are what can I give to you. That sounds so simplistic doesn't it?

Larry: It's profound because it defines final reality. It's who the Trinity is. They are givers.

Notes:

Mart: Why do you keep going back to the Trinity?

Joe: They're servers. Because that's our image. We're made in the image of God and the highest joy is fulfilling that image through our lives. Jesus serves the Father by obeying the will of the Father. The Spirit serves the Son by glorifying the Son. The Father serves the Son and the Spirit. It's this mutual love/serving relationship.

Larry: If I could have one vision for people that are struggling with relationships for the community of God, for the community of the local church, and let me say something that will sound so esoteric, so useless, so academic, so irrelevant, I would want to see people study—you ready for this?—Trinitarian theology. How's that for turning everybody off? I would want people . . .

Joe: Not bad for a counselor, Larry.

Larry: I would want people to think about what is final reality. The reality is you need air to breathe. I mean you're a physical being. If you don't have air, you're going to die. Now we all believe that. When we walk out of a room we open the door because we can't pass through doors. We know there are physical realities that we have to accommodate in our lives by opening a door. We do that. I mean a pagan does it; a Christian does it. An evil person does it; a godly person does it. That's just reality.

Notes:

So what is reality in the sphere of personhood? The reality in this sphere of who I am as a person, the final reality is giving relationships because that's who God is. God is a community. He's not just a monotheistic God. He's one God in three persons, the mystery that we'll never figure out. But he's a community; therefore when I talk about relationships, I want to think about how the Trinity relates to each other and the fundamental issue. It doesn't have to get real fancy here. The fundamental issue is I'm willing to sacrifice for you. Now when it gets down to human relationships, me with my best friend, I've got a couple of best friends but one in particular that I've been with for 20, 30 years who knows everything about me, we are very close friends. I've never had more conflict with anybody than I've had with this guy. He drives me nuts and I offend him. We get into fights. After I was speaking with Joe in a Moody Founders Week on relationships, he and I walked down Chicago streets yelling at each other for half an hour after I'd given a marvelous sermon on relationships.

Mart: And you call him a friend. You really do.

Larry: He's my best friend.

Mart: You're not in denial?

Larry: Oh no. But his wife and my wife were walking behind us and they were laughing at us. And his wife said, oh my gosh

Notes:

is this going to happen? Are they going to break up in their relationship? Before she began laughing, she said that to Rachel, and she just laughed and she said this is what they do. Now let me tell you I'm not suggesting that yelling at each other is the healthiest thing to do after preaching a sermon on relationships, but I'm saying that our fundamental commitment is to be there for the other. Now because we're fallen people, we do get into tensions. I do fail him. I drive him nuts. He drives me nuts at times. I tell him I want to tell him my story and he interrupts me with counsel within ten seconds. I said you haven't even heard me yet. And we get mad at each other. But there's something in the core of my soul that is for this guy. There's something Trinitarian in my soul toward this guy, therefore we have the kind of friendship that I really don't think many people have.

Joe: I fully agree with Larry. It's that whole sense of how does God relate and I'm made in his image; and God does it very successfully, by the way. The Trinity does very well and there's joy and, you know, . . .

Larry: For a long time.

Joe: And then in eternity past they said let's make people like us, and so Genesis chapter 1 says that they were made in his image. My feeling is that God wanted mirror images in flesh of what they were in spirit, to glorify him. And so that's the ultimate

Notes:

goal. So it's not only how the Trinity relates, as Larry's saying, amen to that . . . how does the Trinity relate to me? There's a transference here. Think about [it], God is tolerant with my foibles and fallenness and [we] are so thankful for the tolerance of God. He's patient with me. God gives me grace. God forgives me. You could . . . we could . . . [it would] be wonderful to take a list of how does this Trinitarian God relate to me and all through Scripture is this transference: as I have done this to you, so do this to another. As I have done this, so do this to another. It's a pattern throughout all of Scripture. So am I then taking these gifts of God and giving it as a gift to you as my friend? Am I tolerant with your weaknesses? Am I honest and open? Am I patient? Am I sacrificial? Am I serving you? And so God gives us a template for how we're to build into relationships and then Satan comes into this world; into a very good relationship where Adam and Eve and God were one in a wonderful relationship . . .

Mart: Wants to mess it up.

Joe: And here's how he did it. He said to Eve, let's talk about you. I could make you happier. You ought to do this . . . And suddenly, as Larry often says, Eve gets into this entitlement thing, that this really is all about me.

Larry: Come on Adam.

Joe: I can get more if it was about me. And then it all broke

Notes:

down and what do you have on the other side of that? You have a relational issue with Adam and Eve where there's shame, there's blame, Adam's saying it's the woman you gave me and Eve is saying it's the serpent and the whole thing's falling apart. And by the way, interestingly enough, after Satan came along and did that temptation, he didn't stay around to make them happy. He slithered off to more interesting company and left them with shame and guilt and brokenness and then Jesus came and showed us a way to turn that all around again.

Mart: What if somebody says it's a beautiful story but it's like I'm listening into another world.

Larry: And you are.

Mart: And I'll bet you, Joe, that you grew up in a nice home and your father maybe even loved you and this person says I grew up in a home, never knew my dad to do anything but sit in a chair. He'd come home, sit there with a beer in his hand, watch television . . .

Joe: Tell me I'm so stupid. I'll never amount to anything.

Mart: My mom was depressed and didn't know what to do and she stuck with him because she didn't have any other choice and the kids would . . . None of us have any use for our parents and really don't have much use for anybody. We're just trying

Notes:

to get along. How in the world would somebody from my world even begin to experience something of the world you men are describing?

Larry: You have a choice to make at this point. In Hosea chapter 7 God says, I really long to redeem you but you're getting in the way. You're wailing from your bed. You're not crying from your heart. And I would say, do you want to wail from your bed and just grump about your miserable childhood the rest of your life or do you want to cry from your heart? Do you want to say, God I was designed for more than I'm experiencing? I'm hearing these guys talk about a world I can't even imagine. My background is awful; their background is apparently a lot better than mine and I guess it was. I've had pretty darn good parents and I'm grateful for them. They failed in certain ways but I'm very blessed, as Joe I know feels, but the issue is that no matter what your background, mine, Joe's, or yours, or anybody else's, if you spend your whole time saying, but all I do is hurt, then you're still in the Garden of Eden after the fall. But if rather than that you say I'm going to cry from my heart. God I am hurting so bad. My background has left me so wounded. I feel so self-centered. I feel so dependent on getting somebody to make me feel better in the way dad never did. I'm requiring my husband to move toward me in certain ways. I'm just a mess but I'm crying from my heart. I know this is not your design. If that's your attitude toward it, then yeah, come to me for counseling. Go to Joe's church. Get involved in a community, crying from your heart as opposed to

Notes:

grumping or wailing from your bed and I believe you can enter into the world we're talking about just a little because we've entered into it just a little. I've not gotten very far in this. I've got a whole lot further to go in loving my wife than I've already come after 42 years. I've got much further to go in becoming like God and so do you. So does anybody. So we're all in the same boat ultimately.

Joe: It's a journey. We're all on a journey.

Larry: A long journey.

Joe: You know I've had people come to me and say, but you start so far ahead. I tell people I'm a third generation minister, I've got a legacy of three generations of good godly homes and they say, but I don't have that. And I always love to tell him somebody got it started in my life. Three generations ago somebody came to grips with their walk with Jesus Christ and started to build a godly legacy. It's your opportunity to get it started.

Larry: And it's possible.

Joe: And it's possible. And that's why Jesus came into the broken world. He came into the broken world to help us and to change us around and to put the Holy Spirit . . . Think of the fruits of the Spirit which come by the transforming work of God in our lives as we obey him and walk in the Spirit.

Notes:

They're all relational—love, joy, peace, patience over the long haul, gentleness, goodness, kindness, self control. I mean who wouldn't want to have a friend like that? And when we walk with the Lord, Jesus comes and turns us around and enables us to become the kind of relational person that's going to make a difference in our relationships. In Eden it all fell apart and then God made a promise. I'm going to send somebody to step in and change it all back again and the other Eden is in heaven, and like Larry says we're all just working toward there but we should be working toward there.

Larry: Mart, I would say that the most profound truths are simple truths that have survived complexity and what I understand after living a fair number of years now that Jesus loves me this I know. When I sang that as a 5-year old it was a simple truth. I hadn't survived much at all but after 64 years I still like singing that chorus because it's a simple truth that has become profound in the midst of a world that I cannot figure out and the simplest truth for me about relationships is I'm really here to love you, not to get you to do something for me. Now that's simple. It sounds . . . I don't know what it sounds, but it's true, and the degree to which I look at my wife and I say, honey, when you drive me nuts, I'm going to struggle; I'm going to get mad; I'm going to fail you. I'm going to do all sorts of things but there's a covenant within my soul because of the Holy Spirit, the new covenant within me, that I want to be there for you. That's my commitment to you. My friend who we yell at each other at

Notes:

times and disappoint each other, the deepest reality in my soul is a desire to love that man and because that's my deepest desire, that desire survives all the complexities of our relationship which are manifold and as a result we have a friendship. Relationships are possible because we bear the image of a relational God.

Notes: