

What She Said!
Monday

Relationships and Desires: A Gift and a Trial **Ellen Dykas - Guest Writer**

Today's Treasure

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us
and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:1-2*

Most of us love a great relationship story. It might be a romantic movie like “While You Were Sleeping”, or a soul-knot friendship like that between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel, or Anne and Diana in *Anne of Green Gables*. There’s something about people truly caring, loving and being devoted to one another that stirs something in our emotional DNA.

Embedded in our spiritual DNA is a longing and capacity for relationships. Our relational nature bears the image of our Trinitarian God, existing in relationship with Himself. Through relationships with people, we understand more of who God is as Friend, Bridegroom, Father and Lord. God made us His children, and calls us to imitate Him in loving relationships with people.

Through friendship, marriage, parenting, being neighbors and colleagues, we have the opportunity to grow in Christlikeness. As we’re known, loved, challenged and served (and when we offer these to others), relationships are a primary sanctification tool that God uses to help us grow, but also to expose selfishness and brokenness in our hearts. Relationships are needed for us to faithfully obey God’s commands. We need other people to participate in the two great commands of loving God and neighbor. The great commission will be completed only as God’s people give their lives to others through discipleship and teaching. It’s easy to see that faithfulness to God requires us to resist a “me + Jesus only” mentality.

Relationships, however, are not easy! Our sin can cause problems in relationships we have in this life. Disordered desires fuel conflicts. When I make my needs, longings and preferences ultimate, then I can’t love others... because it’s all about me!

Sinful desires and motivations lead us to overemphasize relationships as we displace the Lord with a person. I've known many marriages which had relational fractures, including the idolatry of a spouse. Husbands make great husbands, but lousy Jesus-replacements! Several friendships and discipleship relationships in my life became all-consuming to me because I craved *being needed* by someone, more than loving them.

"The soul is so constituted that it craves fulfillment from things outside itself and will embrace earthly joys for satisfaction when it cannot reach spiritual ones. The believer is in spiritual danger if he allows himself to go for any length of time without tasting the love of Christ and savoring the felt comforts of a Savior's presence. When Christ ceases to fill the heart with satisfaction, our souls will go in silent search of other lovers."

John Flavel, "The Method of Grace" in *The Whole Works of John Flavel* (London: Baynes, 1820), vol. 2, p. 438.

Sin can also lead to under-emphasizing relationships. Maybe we're just too busy or overextended. Or perhaps we just don't want to move towards someone because we don't easily 'connect'. Maybe we prefer to be a lone ranger and don't want to bother with people. Relationships can be so messy and time-consuming after all! We can't be in close relationship with everyone but as image-bearers, God wants us to honor people, even if they are 'just' acquaintances.

Do you struggle with over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing people and relationships? Maybe you've been hurt and disappointed many times and have concluded it's just not worth it. Regardless of how we each struggle, Jesus Christ is our relationship Redeemer!

God's word has a lot to say to us about relationships and how to face disappointment because of them. Our starting point is to know and understand that Jesus is the one we most need. When He's in His 'right place', then people will be in theirs. That's good news for us!

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your loving initiative towards me. Please change my desires to savor You most of all and to find my comfort and security in Your sweet presence. Amen.