

The Spiritual Habits of Jesus Series

Jesus' Habit of Building Relationships

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Jesus' Habit of Building Relationships

I. Introduction

- A. I came across an article this week from CNN health with the title, “The loneliness epidemic: Nearly 1 in 4 adults felt lonely, new survey finds.”¹ You might be tempted to think this is an American problem, but the reality is much broader: it is a human problem. The study by Meta-Gallup was taken across 142 countries.² They found 24% of people aged 15 and older self-reported feeling very or fairly lonely in response to the question, “How lonely do you feel?” Rates of loneliness were highest in young adults (27 %) ages 19 to 29. The lowest rates were found in older adults aged 65 and over (17 %).
- B. The negative effects of prolonged loneliness affect mental and physical health and can even lead to early mortality. Some of the recommendations by the experts include finding ways to meet new people, talking to other people (including taking steps to chat with people you encounter throughout your day), volunteering, and other similar activities. I would suggest that Jesus provides a better, more satisfying way to overcome loneliness. Some of the biggest problems that create loneliness and broken relationships are not even mentioned by these experts, and the recommendations offered are quite shallow and superficial. They will not lead to the deep transparency and acceptance that Jesus makes available to us. Jesus offers us a better and richer solution for loneliness.
- C. In John 17:20-23, Jesus promotes and explains His regular habit of building relationships. According to Jesus, building the types of relationships that lead to satisfaction of our souls requires much more than finding opportunities to be more social. In reality, everyone has harmful relational tendencies, habits, and behaviors that need to be corrected in order to obtain the result of transparent relationships that can be experienced with acceptance and love—the very thing the human heart craves more than almost anything else.

II. Command to Build Relationships

- A. Before examining Jesus' habit of building relationships, we're going to start the same way we have for the other spiritual habits: seeing what Jesus says and requires about the habit.³ One of the closest statements we get from Jesus about disciples building relationships as a requirement (although it isn't a command) is communicated in the following,

²⁰ I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (Jn. 17:20-23)

¹ [The loneliness epidemic: Nearly 1 in 4 adults feel lonely, new survey finds | CNN](#) Accessed 1/10/24

² [Almost a Quarter of the World Feels Lonely \(gallup.com\)](#)

³ Jesus told His disciples to use their relationships, circumstances, and money wisely for divine purposes (Lk. 16:1-13). In this story Jesus commands His disciples to “make friends” and act “shrewd” in their relationships.

- B. Jesus is praying for His twelve disciples (called apostles) and those who believe in Him through their message (the church) to be united by the Father. The pattern for Christian relationships is found within God Himself—the relationship within the Trinity. The type of relationships disciples build with one another should reflect and imitate the relationship Jesus has with God the Father (“that they may all be one; even as You, Father *are* in me and I in You” v. 21).⁴ The human relationship follows the example of the divine relationship. While human relationships are not the same as divine relationships, there are similarities.⁵
- C. While the relationships disciples have with one another are patterned after Jesus’ relationship with His Father, there is something more going on here. Unity among disciples is created by God Himself, and it happens through a spiritual connection. Without disciples drawing near to God, there will be no unity.⁶ These types of relationships are built with divine resources, “that they may also may be in Us” (v. 21). The unifying factor is a pursuit of God; it is a spiritual union.⁷ Those who “believe in Me” (v. 20) are drawn together as an outworking of being drawn to God. Drawing near to God is what creates the unity and relationship building. If a person is not drawing near to God, there is not going to be deep relationship or unity. The unity depends on closeness to God for its existence. Christian unity flows from a mature walk with Jesus.⁸
- D. The primary cause of this relationship building and unity is God doing His work in the disciple through His indwelling presence by the Spirit (“that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me” vv. 22-23). Jesus is in the disciple and the Father is in Jesus, which creates the oneness disciples have with one another. Jesus had already described how He will be with the disciples through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18, 23-26, 16:12-15). Jesus’ presence will be with the disciples after His departure from this world by the means of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the One who creates unity among the disciples. It is “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).
- E. It will be helpful to clarify what Jesus’ notion of unity looks like, since there are many different ideas that people have about it. There are four aspects of unity mentioned in the immediate context of Jesus’ words. The type of unity and relationship building that Jesus is explaining here is built from acceptance of the truth of Jesus’ message (“Those who believe in Me through their word” v. 20). Jesus and His message are the cornerstone of Christian relationship building, which is communicated through the writings of the apostles. Without agreement on the basic core elements of Christian doctrine, there will be no real unity. This does not mean everyone

⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 302.

⁵ The relationship Jesus has with the Father is one of essence while the disciples are united by spiritual life—mind, effort, purpose. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 364.

⁶ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 364.

⁷ Richard D. Phillips, *John*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, 1st ed., vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 460.

⁸ Gary M. Burge, “*John*,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 873.

who is a disciple will agree with every other disciple on every point of theology and doctrine, but there will be unanimous agreement on the most important issues.⁹

- F. Second, true Christian unity is built on drawing near to God and being knowledgeable about Him (“that they also may be in Us” v. 21 and “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity” v. 23). When individuals are in close fellowship and harmony with God, they will also be united with one another. A person who is either not connected to or distant from God will not have the perfect unity with the church as they might otherwise have.
- G. Third, unity with God’s people requires having the same mission—spiritual purpose—that Jesus Himself established (“I also have sent them into the world” v. 18, “that the world may believe that You sent Me” v. 21). God’s people are united around the task of making disciples for Jesus (Mt. 28:18-20) and watching Jesus build His church as a result (Mt. 16:18). Those who do not actively and personally participate in the task given to His disciples by Jesus will not be united with God’s people. They will be living for an alternative purpose that doesn’t fit with the agenda of God in this world.
- H. Lastly, relationship building and unity is made from the adoption of the character and values of Jesus (“they themselves also may be sanctified in truth” v. 19). Unless a disciple is growing spiritually and progressively being purified from immorality and harmful tendencies, they will not experience close relationships and unity with others.¹⁰ Learning to live in righteousness, holiness, godliness, and truth while being freed from sin is what sanctification refers to. While Jesus never had to be sanctified from sin, He did learn what living righteously required during His lifetime. He experienced sanctification in this sense for our benefit.
- I. Do you put energy and time into building strong and healthy relationships with other people who are committed to Jesus? Are you growing in unity with the people of God concerning these four areas of unity?

III. Jesus’ Habit of Building Relationships

- A. Let’s now turn to Jesus’ habit of building relationships. Jesus masterfully maximized every opportunity given to Him for spiritual impact. One of the ways Jesus did this was by utilizing every relationship and encounter with other people for the building of God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus is smart enough to know how best to use relationships for the good of others. When we get a big picture of how Jesus developed and used relationships, we can increase our ability to impact others spiritually by adopting Jesus’ relational strategies for ourselves. No one was more effective in making disciples than Jesus.
- B. What types of relationships did Jesus build? We will start with the closest relationships Jesus had and move outward to the situations in which Jesus had one-time interactions with

⁹ The list of some of these core elements include: the deity of Jesus (Jn. 20:31), Jesus as the Messiah and only Savior of the world (1 Jn. 2:22), Jesus’ death being the means of forgiveness (1 Cor. 15:3), Jesus’ bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4), and the requirement of trust in Jesus alone to be made right with God (Gal. 1:8). Richard D. Phillips, *John*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Dorani, 1st ed., vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 462. The Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed can also be used to discern the core element of Christian doctrine.

¹⁰ Relational peace is inseparable from being a moral person (Heb. 12:14). Selfish and sinful people will always struggle with developing close and healthy relationships. Unity requires holiness and righteousness.

strangers, along with everyone else in between. This is a fascinating study that can help us structure our social lives most effectively.

- C. First, Jesus developed very close relationships with three of His disciples (called the inner three) who had the most access to Jesus and His inner life. These three disciples experienced Jesus at a deeper level than anyone else, including His most difficult moments. Jesus invited this small circle of people to share life with Him and do life together. Peter, James, and John had the privilege of seeing Jesus in His glorified state (Mt. 17:1-13, Mk. 9:1-9, Lk. 9:28-36), were allowed to witness His great distress in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His death (Mt. 26:36-41, Mk. 14:33-36), and the raising of the synagogue official's daughter from the dead (Mk. 5:35-43). In each of these personal experiences, Jesus invited His closest friends to join Him in His life events. These three disciples had special inside experiences and information about Jesus.
- D. Second, Jesus developed close relationships with a group of twelve disciples (including the previous three) as they lived and worked together (Mt. 17:19, 24:3, 28:16, Mk. 4:34, 12:3). Jesus brought this group of individuals with Him everywhere He went and He gave them special attention. This group of twelve had privileges and access to Jesus that others did not have. Jesus routinely gave this group more information and instruction than anyone else. While this group didn't experience the most personal and intimate moments of Jesus' life like the other three, they still spent plenty of time with Jesus. This group listened to the teachings of Jesus and were able to ask questions and receive personal instruction from Him.
- E. Third, there is a middle group of people numbering from 70-120 who had a special connection with Jesus in that they received some training from Jesus and were sent out to help Jesus with the work He was doing (Lk. 10:1-12). It is unclear how much personal contact this group had with Jesus, but their connection to Him is unmistakable. Some of them also traveled with Jesus throughout His ministry (Ac. 1:21-26), including women who financially supported Jesus and the twelve (Lk. 8:1-3). This more committed group of disciples seemed to have stuck together after Jesus' resurrection because of the instructions they were given (Ac. 1:12-15). The gospels don't give a lot of detail about Jesus' relationship to this group, other than they clearly were trained by Him in some capacity and He trusted them with certain responsibilities related to His ministry.
- F. Fourth, Jesus had some contact with the general public, usually in the form of crowds who assembled to listen to His teaching. In the gospel, Jesus is said to be with the crowds seventeen times but with the smaller group of the disciples forty-six times.¹¹ Jesus had a clear relational priority for the smaller groups. This doesn't mean the crowds weren't important (Jesus spent days at a time teaching them), but the large group was not His primary focus. At the same time, Jesus intentionally traveled around Israel to communicate His message as broadly as possible (Mk. 1:38, Lk. 4:43). According to God's plan, Jesus focused His energy on the people of Israel instead of non-Jews (Mt. 15:24, 10:5-6), but He did not neglect non-Jews when there was opportunity (Mk. 7:25-30, Lk. 7:1-10, Mk. 5:1-15). Going to the Jews first was a matter of priority for Jesus.

¹¹ Dann Spader, [4 Chair Discipling: What He Calls Us to Do](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 81.

- G. Jesus used each of these different types of relationships for the greatest spiritual impact He could have. Jesus treated the relationship He had with His inner circle differently from the relationship He had with the crowds. Each level of relationship was used by Jesus to make disciples to varying degrees. We do well to learn how to do the same.
- H. Utilizing different types of relationships helps us maximize our disciple making potential. How are you using your current network of relationships for the kingdom of God and Jesus? I have three guy friends that I am intentionally more transparent and open with. I communicate regularly with these friends as I share personal moments with them, including plans and dreams, frustrations and difficulties, recent life events, and other such elements. The types of things I share with these guys, I do not share with everyone. These men are my inner circle.
- I. Further, one of the reasons I lead a growth group is to have a slightly wider group of people that I can invest in on a deeper, more personal level. I can do this a bit with the leadership teams of Community Alliance Church as well. For me, these groups are comparable to Jesus' twelve disciples.
- J. Jesus' middle-sized group of disciples can be connected to our church as a whole—those who regularly attend Sunday morning services. This platform gives me the opportunity to have a spiritual impact on a broader group of people but without close personal relationships.
- K. Lastly, I try to have some influence on the broader community at large by writing newspaper articles, looking for opportunities through our kids' sports activities, and announcing youth football games. I would still like to find more ways to have contact with the community at a personal level. Admittedly, this was a lot easier when I worked outside of the church because I could build relationships and have opportunities with my coworkers. For those of you on social media, this could be a way to do something similar.
- L. How about you? Do you or will you intentionally build different levels of relationships so you can maximize your spiritual impact on those around you? Do you use your closest relationships to have an impact on others for Jesus? Be encouraged to look for ways to broaden your influence beyond your closest circle of friends. Discover different levels of relationships you could use for the sake of the kingdom of God.

IV. How to Practice Building Relationships

- A. How might we build relationships practically? A helpful tool can be what is called “relational mapping.” Relational mapping can also be used for business purposes, but the church can use it for evangelism and disciple making purposes. While there are different ways to do this, a basic and helpful version is built from the four most common places we spend our time.¹² Here is this version of relational mapping works.
- B. Take a blank sheet of paper and orient it on the long edge (landscape). A sample template can be found on the church app.¹³ Start by writing the four locations you spend most of your time—one in each corner. For example, someone may put work in the top left corner, home in the top right corner, church in the bottom left corner and the gym in the bottom right corner.

¹² This version came from a video by Canyon Ridge Christian Church: [How To Draw Your Relational Map | Find Your People, Find Your Partners | Canyon Ridge Christian Church](#)

¹³ It is titled Relational Map Resource and is found on the Training tab of Community Alliance Church's app.

- C. Next, put your name in the middle of the piece of paper with a circle around it. Now you will ask yourself the question: Who am I going to? Think about the specific people God has placed in your path that you could have an impact on for Jesus. Think of people who aren't familiar with Jesus or those who aren't as far along as you in following Jesus. Identify the people in each location that you could intentionally have regular contact with and influence for Jesus. You may not have much contact with them yet, other than saying hi or exchanging pleasantries, but with more focus and effort, a deeper relationship could develop with the regular contact you have with that person.
- D. When you identify a person with whom you could have regular and ongoing contact through your normal rhythms of life and daily routine, write that person's name on the quadrant in which you have contact with them and draw a circle around their name. For example, a person may write the name of David in the bottom right portion of their paper because he is at the gym most of the days the person doing the diagram is there. Draw a line from your name to the individual you have identified.
- E. Further, it may be that a person you have identified has connections with someone else you are aware of. In that case you can draw a line from your identified person to another person who has a relationship with the identified person. A line might be drawn from David to his girlfriend. You may know her name so you can simply write "David's girlfriend." If David is reached with the message of Jesus, he would have the opportunity to pass it on to those closest to him, including his girlfriend. If you have contact with a lot of people, are any of them more strategic in that they have a wider relational network and potential for influence that could be impacted by Jesus?
- F. Finally, fill in as many names as you can for each location. Draw as many lines as possible from your name to other people. Don't settle for one or two names at each location. Spend some time brainstorming. If you don't know a person's name, write down a distinguishing feature that will help you identify the person. In the home area, write down your neighbors, delivery drivers, contractors who come into your home to make repairs, visiting family members, parents of your kids' friends, etc. Be creative.
- G. As you are making your relational map, ask yourself the following types of questions. Is this person friendly and open to having conversations, or do they seem closed off? Do you have good opportunities to develop and deepen a relationship with this person? If so, how will you do this? Who is most open to spiritual conversations? Has anyone expressed interest in learning more about Jesus? Have they said anything related to God or spirituality in the past? Have I brought up Jesus to them previously? If so, how did they respond? As you answer these questions, you will be able to start prioritizing people according to your contact with them and their spiritual openness. Start with people you think will be more open to Jesus.

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus used relationships very wisely to serve and impact others spiritually. He encouraged His disciples to follow His life pattern and do the same. Jesus' relationships had varying degrees of closeness, time, and attention, but each of them was used for the kingdom of God to maximize spiritual impact and disciple making opportunities.

- B. Every disciple should strive to obey the command, “⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.” (Col. 4:5). How will you personally make the most of every opportunity with the relationships you have and the people you have contact with?

VI. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Think about a few of the best relationships you’ve ever had. What made these relationships so strong?
- B. What important practice of relationship building is explained by Jesus in Mt. 18:21-35? What is a motivating factor for this practice?
- C. What can we learn about the unity that comes from relationship building according to Colossians 3:12-15?
- D. What was the most mentioned attitude Jesus had toward others (Mt. 9:13, 12:7, 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 18:27, 20:34, Mk. 1:41, 6:34, Lk. 7:13, 10:33, 15:20)?
- E. What relational practices and skills do people need to learn to have peaceful and healthy relationships?