

HEART OF THE PROBLEM

All too often, a relationship does Not become healthy and vibrant.
Too frequently, relationships with delightful and life-giving potential wither and fade.

When a relationship is not nurtured / when love does not prevail, then it disintegrates and becomes broken,..... and both parties are hurt.

Years ago, I counselled a couple. I'll call them Frank and Mary.

Their marriage began as most do: with romance fuelled excited anticipation andpersonal expectations.

Yet, I learned that Mary was seeking reward elsewhere; she was pouring out her time and passion in an activity that didn't include her husband.

He was feeling rejected and ignored, and usually vented his emotions by tersely berating and degrading her.

They both declared, in defence, that they were being dutiful spouses.

But, he wasn't getting what he expected, including prepared meals and a clean house.

She wasn't getting what she expected, which was to be appreciated, respected and.....adored. That had expectations for each other, yet what they truly needed was much deeper than those things.

I learned that both of them never really bonded. They each had their own "personal expectations" for the relationships. They wanted "stuff" / benefits from the marriage.

For years, he behaved as if he was still single, and did not make Mary / the relationship the priority in his life. He was taking care of himself, and I hoped the marriage would merely be a bonus for his established life.

Mary's myth was that if she did what was expected of her, then devotion and adoration would follow.

Neither surrendered themselves, in love, to each other... which creates something new and different – a healthy, life-giving relationship.

The two did not become one. They remained two individuals assuming that the other would give them what they wanted.

Missing was a devoted commitment,... a total surrendering investment... which is based on **trust**.

The spark of love from Romance..... went cold.

They were only in it for **selfish reasons**.

Their relationship would soon be on trial,..... and judgment is never fun.

The Micah passage is a trial.
It begins with the call to hear the charges – hear ye, hear ye.

God shared examples of how God cared, nurtured and protected God people, and then God asks, “...[how] have I wearied you?”

In other words, “tell me why you have not returned my love? “How have I pushed you away?”

The people didn’t get it..... because their focus was elsewhere. They had their own priorities,..... and, I suppose, they assumed that God would meet their expectations, and all they had to do was appease God.

They didn’t grasp how important love and trust is to a relationship.

They wrongly believed that they could placate God / buy God off with token gifts – being dutiful. A prime calf and a thousand rams are not much different than “a bouquet of flowers” or ... a “sacrificial” gesture, such as visiting the in-laws,... or surprise gift.

The people even got a little nasty with their sarcastic, caustic accusation that God was so demanding that God would **only** be content if a firstborn child was given to amend things.

Sounds a bit like..... “**What**, I suppose you want me to stay home every night?”
Or.... “I can’t do anything to make you happy”..... Or... “You just want a lap dog–someone who worships you and waits on you.”..... or.... you won’t be content until you control everything.”.....

And, in the realm of the church relationship, it sounds like, “I’ve paid my dues; the church shouldn’t demand anything from me”..... or.... “I’m not getting anything out this; my needs aren’t being met” or... “I’ll donate a few more bucks, but I better see results that I like.”

Disappointments, frustration and accusations are tell tale signs of a relationships in crisis: could be with a partner, with a church, with nature... or with God.

A broken relationship,..... also includes pain, loss and sorrow.

In the Ephesians five passage, Paul uses the marriage relationship as an analogy for the church, as he clearly states in verse 32.

This text has been abused by some and it’s been a vexation to others.

Some circles have used Paul’s words to repress woman.
They have grossly misinterpreted the message.

And, poor Paul,....unjustly gets a bad rap,.... today... and in his day.
2,000 years ago, Paul would have been hassled for empowering women, and now we’re prone to blame him for limiting women.

Paul took what was called the “household code”, altered it for believers, and used it to teach a lesson about the church.

In the culture at the time, the “Household code” was a common and familiar guideline for marriages. It served to remind wives that they are really just the husbands’ property, and that husbands should treat them right, too.

Paul taught that we are all equal under God, so Paul radically altered the code by adding the opening statement, verse 21. His addition empowered women by defining “to be subject” as a mutual act. Both partners are to be subject to each other!

That added feature must be kept in mind as the rest of the passage is read, including the concession that the man is the decision making aspect of the relationship – the head.

Nevertheless, Paul’s primary intent is to teach about the nature of the church and how we do that relationship.

Paul ties elements of the code to our relationship with the church and with God.

He stresses that the church is the body of Christ—we do the work of Christ,.... as lead by Christ.

We are not merely a club or institution.

We the church – the “called out” which is the meaning of the Greek word, Ekklesia, we the called out form the body of Christ in the world, today.

And, this creation was formed and filled with love, and the outpouring of love continues through the Holy Spirit.

Paul then reminds us that this is a relationship, similar to a marriage, therefore the love and outpouring is mutual.

As is necessary for a life-giving and vibrant relationship, we must nurture, care for and give our all to our partner,....for the relationship,.... be it with Christ through the churchor with our marital partner.

And, of course, we understand Christ as the loving and redeeming face of God.

In verse 31, Paul reminds us of the mystery of a loving relationship—when two become one. He uses that as analogy for how believers / follows of Christ.... become one – the church.

This mystery seems to be the neglected / ignored dynamic in most broken marriages and loving relationships.

To create the union / to form the “one” requires a letting go of self for the other, and this is impossible without love and trust.

Marriages do not grow into a wholeness, a life-giving union when the partners hold back, serve their own interests instead of the other's.

Most relationships often start with romance filled with joyful anticipation and expectations. However, romance is an emotional state that can invite personal investment—true actions of love, trust and devotion, but romance is not real living / real engagement and involvement. Romance is fun because it is energizing and doesn't cost much.

Some churches have a theology of “romance” – full of emotions and high hopes, but very little tangible discipleship and service.

And, not surprisingly, that shallow theology easily slips into being mean and judgmental..... because real, applied love and grace is lacking.

In the state of fanciful anticipation, much is expected,... but little is given,..... and disappointment and meanness can erupt when the expectations are not met.

To be sure, marriage or any loving relationship is not based on a quid pro quo exchange. Quid pro quo is Latin for “What for what”, and it means an equal exchange, such as you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

That attitude is still self centred because it states, I'll give only if I'll get something in return of equal value.

Partners caught in a relationship crisis frequently counter, “Well, I did such and such, and you did nothing in return.

That same mentality shows up when we are tempted to give to God believing that God will pay us back, and maybe with dividends... since so few give “so grandly”.

Nevertheless, our base instinct is to survive, so we must protect ourselves. we can not neglect ourselves without just cause / without the confidence, the experience that our trust in another was not abused.

Vibrant, love filled relationships take time. They grow from safely trusting and being trustworthy, and each leap / each step takes love.

Each step / each our pouring devotion / each act of trust enhances the relationship - new creation.

Being self centred, protecting self, building walls is counter to being intimate, honest and vulnerable— all core ingredients in trust.

Broken marriages cry out neglect, fear, sorrow and emptiness. It may sound like anger, but the cry is really the moan for missing love.

On the surface, two couple may throw accusations at each other, yet what is really being said is, “I'm hurting and I need to trust, to love and be loved.” “I want to be more than just me—alone.

Sometimes we cry out to God searching to be more spiritual / to be more alive..... to be in a healthy, life-giving relationship with God.

It is often said, “I want to grow spiritually.”, yet God’s spirit is not a resource / a commodity that we can tap into for a quick fix.

God’s Spirit is Love..... and love grows in relationship,... and relationships take time. They must be lived.

When things are not going well in a relationship, we must try to avoid defensive accusation, and instead ask questions.

A question is really a simple act of trust – it is being open and it is respecting the other.

When a relationship is in crisis..... ask “I” questions, such as, “What have I done wrong” or... “how can I do better.”

This is what God did in the Micah passage. God asked, “how have I wearied you?” God was respecting the people’s opinion, and God made the relationship the priority.

Even though, they were a bit rude, they still replied with a question,... and God provide an answer. God’s reply showed vulnerability and God’s desire for a real relationship.

Micah 6:8 states what God desires, and that is to walk humbly with “YOUR” God.

Being in a relationship with God /Walking with God means we go as God goes: in step with God doing justice/ being fair and loving kindness/ being gracious.

In addition, we go as God goes..... with humility.

God gave us Christ..... in humility and in trust.

How are we to do this relationship thing with God?

How are we to live each day as the body of Christ?

Are we here just for ourselves?... with little or no regard to the relationship? Do we only occasionally walk with God, and how can that be done? Either we walk with someone or we do not.

Are we committed to a relationship with God?

And, do we really trust and love God?

Could we give away all we possess and own to God, and be fully confident that we will be okay.

Do we fully trust God’s love for us?

Or,... should we have a back up plan?

Are we content in our relationship with God?

If not, maybe we should ask some “I” questions?

Today is stewardship Sunday.

How we regard giving is a reflection on the health of any relationship.
Are we giving or merely trying to control an outcome?

What does God require of us in regards to returning / sharing what is really God’s in the first place??

I believe God is love, and love does not destroy, nor does it demand too much. God is humbly trying to walk with us.

Few are at the point where God would lovingly ask us to release all that is under our care – what is our part?

However, I believe,.... if we have any concern about our relationship with God, then we’d be prudent in asking what God requires of us?

And, when it comes to money, I think the question would translate to:
What percent is God asking me to give?

On paper, our church is a little short on cash.

In reality, I think we may be a little short on questions to God.
I think that is the heart of the problem.

The body of Christ does not depend on cash; it depends on love, devotion and trust.

So what is the health of our relationship with God?
How do we regard the body of Christ?

And, Dare we even ask God / do we trust God enough to ask,
“What percentage is God asking me to give?”

Are we keeping in step with God?