

Better Together
Part 4B: Factors for relationship success or failure
Romans 12:5
October 23, 2006
by Rick Warren and Gary Carnahan

1. Selfishness vs selflessness

James 4:1-2

Philippians 2:4

Galatians 6:7-8

2. Pride vs. humility

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Colossians 3:13

Titus 3:3-7

Isaiah 93:18-19

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Factor for failure

Factor for success

1.

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Introduction

When I was in school to become an electrician I went through a number of laboratories and simulations so the teacher could see if I could take the knowledge in my head and put it into practice.

Years later, houses and businesses that I wired can be thankful that I made my mistakes in the laboratory where my mistakes could be corrected.

The small groups we have been stressing are the laboratory for learning how to get along with each other.

The skills that you learn in the small group can be applied: in your work, your family, and in any relationship you want to succeed.

These practice labs are necessary because we're not born knowing how to have healthy relationships. The family in which you grew up in should have taught you how to have good relationships but some of them couldn't teach it because they didn't have it. I've talked to so many people who've gone through a divorce, who have no idea why it happened because they just don't understand the factors that destroy or build relationships.

Romans 12:5

“Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.”

Here's the problem: unless we learn the factors that cause relationships to fail or succeed

We'll only learn by making mistakes in relationships that are far less forgiving.

Today I'm going to explain how that happens, and how you can prevent it from happening.

God's word shows us that every relational problem comes down to one of four negative attitudes.

They are the enemies of community:

Enemy number one is

1. Selfishness

Selfishness destroys relationships.

It is the number one cause of conflict,
the number one cause of arguments, divorce, and war.

James 4:1-2 "What causes fights and quarrels, don't they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but you don't get it."

When you start a relationship,
you work at being selfless or being unselfish,
but then as time goes on, selfishness begins to creep in.

We put more energy into starting relationships
than we do into maintaining relationships!

For example, here are the five stages of a married cold:

[Excerpted from "The Seven Stages of a Married Cold", from Staying Close by Dennis & Barbara Rainey,

first year: "Baby darling, I'm worried about that sniffle.

So I've called the paramedics to rush you to the Hospital for a checkup and a week of rest.

And I know you don't like hospital food,
so I'm having gourmet meals brought in for you."

Second year of a marriage:

"Sweetheart, I don't like the sound of that cough.

I've arranged for Dr. Knotts to make a house call.

Let me tuck you in bed."

Third year of a marriage:

"You look like you've got a fever.

Why don't you drive yourself over to WaWa

get some medicine, I'll watch the kids."

Fourth year: "Look, be sensible.

After you've fed and bathed the kids, washed the dishes,
you really ought to go to bed."

Fifth year: "Do you have to cough so loud? I can't hear the TV.

Selfishness destroys relationships but
it's human nature to be selfish.

When a baby is born, its first words are "I....!" "Me....!"
Everybody thinks it's so cute but it's really a selfish barbarian that
demands total attention,
doesn't give anything back and
some people never grow out of that stage.

They just add some more words:

How do I look? How do I feel? Who's hurt me?

We are naturally selfish, and
our culture feeds our selfish tendencies
Every advertisement that comes out caters to your self-centeredness...

"We do it all for you."

"Have it your way,"

"Obey your thirst."

"What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."

It's ok for you to be immoral and rotten and do anything you want to,
as long as you do it in Los Vegas

If you think about those slogans you realize they could have been
written by a toddler, for toddlers:

They are saying: "Do whatever your urges are.

You're just an animal.

Live for yourself regardless of what it does to everybody else."

How is any of that going to help you build the kind of skills

necessary to building a relationship with anybody except yourself?

Proverbs 28:25, “Selfishness only causes trouble

Selfishness destroys relationships, but **SELFLESSNESS builds them.**

Selflessness is a little bit less of me, and a little bit more of you.

Selflessness is realizing you are not the whole center of the universe.

Selflessness is thinking about other people.

Philippians 2:4 describes selflessness

“Look out for one another’s interest, not just your own.”

Selflessness

brings out the best in others.

builds relationships because

it not only transforms a relationship,

it also transforms people in the relationship.

In the movie **As Good As It Gets**

Jack Nicholson is an impossible, selfish, cranky, grumpy guy with

all kinds of compulsions and hang-ups, that nobody likes.

But Helen Hunt shows him genuine selflessness, and it transforms him.

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Jack: Well my compliment to you is: The next morning, I started taking the pills.

Helen: I don’t quite get how that’s a compliment for me.

Jack: You make me want to be a better man.

Helen: That’s maybe the best compliment of my life.

Jack: Well maybe I overshot a little because I was aiming at just enough to keep you from walking out.

Here’s a list of practical ways you can practice selflessness in your small group laboratory this week:

#1 Show up.

I figured this out when I was a teenager and

the pastor we had was boring.

As church time rolled around I knew I was subjecting myself

to extreme boredom.

But I kept showing up because even at that age I knew there could always be someone else in church that needed me to encourage them,

#2 By accepting new people in your group,
even those that might not be as altogether perfect as you are.

#3 By listening.

When you really listen to people and you're not thinking,
"What am I going to say next?"

When you're really listening to people and you're not multitasking,
you're paying attention and practicing selflessness.

Listening is drawing other people out to talk in your small group and
you say, "Well what do you think?"

Practicing selflessness is when you
ask questions instead of dominating the conversation.

Practicing selflessness is when you offer to help people in your group.

Galatians 6:7-8 "The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others and ignoring God, harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for it in his life is weeds. But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life and eternal life."

What you plant, you're going to reap.

If you plant criticism, people are going to be critical of you.

If you plant affirmation, people are going to affirm you.

Plant jealousy – reap jealousy

So this passage tells us how to reap good things.

First, "Respond to God, not to what others do."

That means when somebody is offensive to you,
you might want to be offensive back to them but
respond the way God has treated you, not the way other people do.
The more unselfish you are, the more God pours into your life.

That's why we keep asking you for things.
 When we ask you to fold clothes at Helping Hands
 or take a turn in the nursery
 or bring candy for Trunk or treat
 or get into a small group,
 these are opportunities to practice unselfishness.

Unfortunately, a lot of people go through life and
 never learn unselfishness
 as a result: they waste their life.
 So notice this verse is describing a growth process.

This transformation does not occur overnight.
 You're not going to learn it in 40 days.
 It's going to take the rest of your life, because
 the only one way you can learn to love is by practicing it

2. *Pride*

Anybody can be unselfish every once in a while.
 But as soon as you congratulate yourself for how unselfish you are
 you encounter the second big thing that kills relationships:

PRIDE destroys relationships.

If you are critical of other people,
 if you tend to be judgmental of other people,
 if you tend to look down at other people,
 if you tend to be picky...
 you have a pride problem.

If you tend to be competitive and you're always comparing,
 You have a pride problem.

If you have difficulty in apologizing
 or asking for forgiveness - you have a pride problem.

If you keep everything superficial,
 and you never let anybody get close to you,
 you have a pride problem because
 pride is just too shallow to care about others.

Pride shows up in a small group when someone always has to tell a story that tops the last story. or in those who are always offering advice but never ask for any.

Pride shows up when you cannot admit that you've had a tough week.
Proverbs 16:18 "Pride will destroy a person. A proud attitude leads to ruin."

The antidote to pride: Humility.

Pride destroys relationships **HUMILITY builds them.**

1 Peter 3:8 "Live in harmony. Be sympathetic. Love each other. Have compassion, and be humble."

These five things are what we should be doing in our families and our groups and other relationships.

Notice that first one : "Live in harmony."

To be in harmony we don't have to be the same.

Good relationships can be like the notes in a cord.

A is not the same as C

and C is not the same as E

but they can work together ACE

You might be a C, but you don't need other Cs to harmonize

We can be different and still work together.

If the flute player in the symphony wants to stand on his chair and play louder than everybody else, it ruins the whole thing.

If a group has one person who's saying, "Notice me" and cannot let other people be noticed,

there is no harmony because

harmony and humility go together to build a relationship.

Ephesians 4:23-24 "Let the spirit change your way of thinking, and make you into a new person."

So here's the good news of the day,

the Holy Spirit can make you a better person.

The basic law of relationships is this:

You will become like the people you spend time with.

Emotional health is contagious so if you

spend time with grumpy people, you get more grumpy.

If you spend time with happy people, you get more happy.

If you want to have more humility,

spend time with Jesus Christ because he is humble.

Philippians 2:3,5,6 “*Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves.*

Your attitude should be the same as that the Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God.”

No one has been more humble than Jesus.

The more time you spend time around him,

The more humble you’ll become and therefore,

more able to build a relationship.

3. INSECURITY destroys relationships.

Proverbs 29:25 “The fear of human opinion disables.”

Relationships are destroyed when a person is so insecure that all they’ve got to think about is their opinion and what others think of them.

It’s an amazing dilemma -- We long to be close, but we also fear being close.

We want it, but we don’t want it.

We long to have intimacy with others, but

we are also scared to death of having intimacy with others.

Insecurity prevents intimacy.

You won’t get close to somebody if there is fear in the relationship.

Do you remember what Adam said to God?

Genesis 3:10 “I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid.”

When we're afraid—
we hide, we cover up,
we pretend to be people that we're not,
and the last thing we ever want to be in
is a small group that might find out the truth.

Through the falling moral standards on TV our culture has lost
it's fear of physical exposure, but we're terrified of emotional exposure.

So people flaunt their bodies and
put revealing photos on their Facebook page
but are still emotionally insecure.
They are afraid somebody might see their fears,

finds their faults,
find their dark side, or
find the part that they don't want anybody to know.”

Fear makes us dishonest and it causes us to build up walls.
As a result, nobody ever gets to know you.

But there is a fear even deeper: the fear of rejection.
We've all been rejected at some point, so
we know how much that hurts.

We don't ever want to feel that hurt again so
we close ourselves off and say,
“I'll never let anybody hurt me again.”

Maybe you have been hurt by rejection
by a boyfriend, an ex,
or even a parent who told you that you are not good enough.”

Maybe you felt the sting of rejection
by a teacher, coach, or girlfriend.

If anybody understands rejection, it's Jesus.

Jesus faced the ultimate rejection so he understands how you feel.

It didn't stop him from loving you
so if we are going to be like him - don't let it stop you either.

Insecurity destroys relationships.

LOVE builds relationships.

1 John 4:18, "Love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear.
If we're afraid, it shows that his love has not been perfected in us."

The moment you begin to realize how much God loves you --
you don't have to prove yourself anymore.

The moment you begin to realize how much God loves you --
you don't have to spend your life trying to impress other people,
you're not pressured by everybody else's expectations anymore.

The moment you begin to realize how much God loves you,
your self-worth is no longer caught up in what others might think of you

You can take the first step by strengthening your relationship with
Jesus Christ.

When you say yes to Jesus Christ, you're saying yes to a kind of love
that can throw fear out the back door of your life.

Finally, the fourth enemy of community is resentment

4. RESENTMENT destroys relationships.

Job 5:2 "To worry yourself to death with resentment is a foolish,
senseless thing to do."

We all make mistakes,

Because we're all imperfect, you're going to hurt other people and
other people are going to hurt you, intentionally and unintentionally.

But what you do about the hurt is more important than the initial hurt.

You can choose to let it make you bitter or better.

Every group of people has an EGR.

Small groups have an EGR

work groups have an EGR

orchestras have an EGR

families have an EGR.

EGR stands for: Extra grace required.

EGRs are the people who do the little things

that other people resent.

If you cannot think of who your EGR is, it's probably you.

If you know who your EGR is, don't try to get rid of them

someone else will take their place.

So you might as well start by asking God to fill you with so much love that you don't resent the EGR.

This is important because

the point of these small groups is not to teach you content,

they are to teach you how to love.

That's why we believe everybody needs to be in a small group.

You don't learn to love on your own.

You don't learn it from a book,

you learn to love by practicing love, particularly

with someone who is hard to love!

After you have prayed for more ability to love others

you can go to the EGR and say "Maybe I'm a little extra sensitive but this kind of thing bugs me, can we talk about it?"

The second worst thing to do about an EGR is avoid the issue.

The very worst thing

is avoid talking to the person you find hard to love –

that builds resentment

and resentment destroys relationships.

When you get resentful, you stop thinking clearly.

Resentment leads to self-defeating behavior.

Psalm 73:21-22 "Since my heart was embittered,

that means resentful,

"and my soul was deeply wounded. I was stupid and I could not understand."

In other words, I didn't think straight so I defeated myself.

When you are resentful

your perspective gets clouded but your adrenaline is still pumping.

(That's the equivalent of drinking and driving for relationships.)

You're still upset and they are oblivious and on their happy merry way.

You're not hurting them with resentment.
 You get tied up in a knot because you hold it in,
 or sometimes, you express it in the wrong way and you do something
 really stupid.

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES (Chap 27 1:21:01)

Woman #1: Nice. I've been out here all day. Uh, excuse me, I was waiting for that space?

Woman #2: Yeah? Tough.

Woman #3: Face it, lady. We're younger and faster.

Woman #1: TAWANDA! (screams and crashes) Yes ma'am!

Woman #2: What are you doing?! Are you crazy?!

Woman #1: Face it girls. I'm older and I have more insurance.

One of the functions of a small group is to help you think straight
 when you've been hurt.

If you come to your group and say,
 "You know what, I had this thing today and it was just so...
 I wanted to ring that guy's neck!"

And they respond "Did you really want a lawsuit?"

Life will hurt, so you need other people to help you think it through and
 keep you from doing dumb things.

Hebrews 12:15

"Look after each other Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you for as it
 springs up, it causes deep trouble hurting many in their spiritual lives."

So when somebody is hurting in a group, gather around them, help
 them, and keep them from getting bitter.

Let them know

The antidote to resentment is forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS builds relationships
 and every relationship needs some forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13 "You must make allowances for each others' faults and forgive
 the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive
 others."

Unless you're dead you're going to need more forgiveness in the future

and so you better offer it to others now.

I know some of you are saying I can't do it. I just...

I cannot forgive that person."

That's why you need Jesus Christ because you're right,
you can't do it on your own.

You need God's supernatural love in you.

Titus 3:3-7 "Once our lives were full of resentment and envy, but then Christ saved us. Not because we were good enough to be saved because we're not, but because of his kindness and love," that's his grace, "by washing away our sins, everything forgiven, just wiped out. And giving us the new joy of the dwelling Holy Spirit. God puts his spirit of love in my life, all because of what Jesus our savior did on the cross. So he could declare us not guilty in God's eyes."

Resentment dries you up emotionally.

Then you don't have anything to give to anybody else because you are so stuck in the past, you can't get on with the future.

Lights: 14-17 off slowly

Who do you need to forgive?

Some of you are still allowing people from your past to hurt you in the present.

Every time you hold onto that grudge,
you are perpetuating your own pain.

Forgiveness is the only way to get on with your life.

The person who hurt you probably doesn't deserve forgiveness.

Neither did you, but God forgave you anyway.

But God brought you here this morning because
he's got some good news for you.

"The Lord says forget what happened before, and don't think about the past. I'm going to do something new in your life, and I will make rivers on a dry land.

Isaiah 93:18-19

Lights: 14-17 off, fade down #9-11

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You may have had some relational disasters in your life,
welcome to the human race.

Everybody has had some relational disasters.

What are you going to do with them?

God wants to start something totally new in your life today.

It starts with making sure you have been born again
so you can be qualified to receive the Holy Spirit in your life.

He can change you from relationship impaired
to relationship improved.

Here you have four factors for relationship failure,
and four corresponding antidotes.

Every one of those antidotes, every cure for relationship problems
is an attitude that can only enter your life
through the cleansing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

If your selfishness is saturating your relationships,
the Holy Spirit can replace that attitude with selflessness.

If pride is preventing depth in your relationships
the Holy Spirit can bring humility into your life.

If insecurity is insulating you from intimate relationships
you'll find the fruit of the Spirit is love.

If resentment is ruining your relationships,
the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life will give you
the grace to forgive.

Please stand

Piano begins

Who do you need to be more unselfish with?

Who have you been critical or judgmental of?

Have you been unwilling to admit "I was wrong, I'm sorry, please
forgive me?"

Who do you need to say that to?

Have you been afraid of being real with other people and

You're only as sick as your secrets.
Who do you need to forgive?

*So pray this prayer, in your heart,
"Dear Jesus, You've seen every relationship
I've ever had, the good, the bad and the ugly.
Selfishness, pride, insecurity and resentment messed them up.
I admit that I need your help, Jesus, in my life and in my relationships.
So as much as I understand,
I ask you Jesus to come into my life and live through me,
and put your love through me.
I want that fresh start that you offer. In your name I pray, Amen."*