

## **Lecture 23 – “Friends, Enemies, and Relationships”**

**Psalms 109, Psalm 133; Proverbs 17, 27**

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I would like to begin today with a survey of the various types of lessons that you may have had in your lifetime. How many of you have ever taken some type of music lessons? How many have taken any swimming lessons? How about golf or bowling lessons? Dance lessons? cooking lessons? Horseback riding? Tennis? Public speaking? Scuba diving?

I am sure you get the idea. Our society believes in continuing education. While these lessons are very good, there is one area in which most of us have never had any public or formal training. Yet, it is one of the most important training of all...relationships. We all need lessons on how to develop loving **RELATIONSHIPS**.

God tells us that it is not good for man to be alone. The Bible tells us that we were made for community (see Genesis 2:18; Proverbs 13:20; Proverbs 27:17). Relationships are important because they can either make us feel miserable or magnificent. Additionally, relationships develop our character. Who you are a year from today will largely be determined by the things you allow in your mind and the people with whom you relate. 1 Corinthians 15:33 states, “Bad company corrupts good character.” Who we spend our time with shapes us.

In our society today, relationships are fragmenting at an alarming rate. Very few people know how to relate to others. And there aren’t many good role models around. Television certainly is lacking in this area.

What does God say should be our dominant life principle—our life’s aim? We read in 1 Corinthians 14:1 that we should “make love your greatest aim.” Of all the things God could have said we should build our life on, why love?

I Corinthians 13 tells us we ought to make love our greatest aim in life because of the priority God gives it. Notice the importance that God puts on love in the next few verses.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (verse 1). Words without love are empty, just noise.

“If I have the gift of prophecy, and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love I am nothing” (verse 2). You may have educational degrees, and be a brilliant, walking encyclopedia, but if you do not have love, it doesn’t matter.

Relationships are more important than accomplishments in life. Success without love is empty. One day, God will do an audit on your life and when He evaluates your life, He is not going to focus on your accomplishments, or your bank account. He is going to be concerned about your relationship with Him and others who are in your life.

Long ago, I used to be a mathematics specialist, but no longer. I used to love solving algebraic equations for the unknown variable. My love for math has evolved from finding relationships among numbers to paying more attention to the human factors in relationships. My favorite equation now is, “Life minus love equals zero!” *All that we do is insignificant without love.*

Today’s message will focus on friendships, enemies, and relationships. The parts will intertwine, but I will conclude with a focus on Jesus and how His example should shine brightly through us.

Let’s see what the Bible says on the matter of RELATIONSHIPS in Psalm 133. This song is written by David and, although we don’t know exactly when he composed it, many commentators agree that one likely occasion was when David was finally received as king over all the tribes of Israel, ending a terrible season of national division and discord.

The opening verse of this psalm exclaims that “brothers dwelling in unity is good and pleasant.” As you will recall, conflict between brothers is a major theme in Genesis with Cain killing Abel, Ishmael mocking Isaac, Esau wanting to kill Jacob and Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery.

Fraternal conflict continued when Jesse, David’s father, sent David to check on his older brothers who had gone off to battle with Saul. David’s brothers did not appreciate “little brother” checking on them. Discord continued even when David was a father and his sons had their share of difficulty. David’s son, Absalom, murdered his half-brother, Amnon. Then Absalom conspired to take the kingdom from his father. And half-brother, Adonijah, tried to steal the kingdom from Solomon, David’s appointed heir to the throne.

As we reflect on these “brotherly struggles,” we can feel the significance of the words when we read, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) It is good because it reflects God’s heart and purpose of unity among His people (see John 17:20-23, Ephesians 1:9-10). It is pleasant because it makes life together as God’s people so much more enjoyable than seasons when hurt feelings and conflict dominate.

Unity among God’s people enables them to have a thriving and healthy life. Unfortunately, unity does not always occur in the church as it should. Our unity is important because it makes the church a positive example to the world and helps draw others to Christ. Living in unity does not mean that we will agree on everything, but we must agree on our purpose in life—to work together for God. When God’s people combine their efforts to accomplish what God has planned for them to do, they will do great things.

Furthermore, in verse 3, the Lord commanded the blessing—life forevermore. Since we will have life forevermore with the people of God, it seems to me that we should strive to enjoy unity with them now.

Yahweh has commanded and ordained, that His people will dwell in His place, and enjoy His goodness under the reign of His King forever. Nothing can stop it, not even death. The King will come. The priest will be anointed and brothers and sisters will dwell in perfect unity.

But before that happens, there will be DISUNITY, strife, and discord. And so, it seems appropriate to turn our attention to the topic of “Enemies” and people who act disagreeably.

## ENEMIES

I am sure that we have all come into contact with someone who has caused strife in our lives. Because we are all different, we will have misunderstandings. Words do not mean the same thing to different people. We think “my way is the right way.” Or we might even think we can figure out another’s motives...we can’t because people are motivated differently. Sometimes I can’t figure out my own motives—why I do what I do. How can I assume I can figure out somebody else?

You may have labeled someone in your life as an enemy due to the characteristics he or she demonstrated that ruin relationships such as jealousy,

envy, pride, resentment, or anger. It could be a business rival who seeks to constantly undermine you. Jealousy might drive someone to resent you and tell lies about you for financial gain. A salesman might envy other salesmen who are more successful financially. Doctors envy other doctors, vice presidents resent other vice presidents who receive more praise, secretaries envy other secretaries. Students are jealous of other students as they compare clothes, boyfriends, cars, grades, and athletic ability.

We live in a very competitive world. We are all touched by **envy** and **jealousy**. The whole advertising business is built on creating envy. Here is the message promulgated by the media: “If you buy our product, you will be the envy of everybody else.”

People who are envious enjoy hearing negative news about others. In fact, history was made in 1991 when the book Nancy Reagan: The Unauthorized Biography sold 950,000 copies in the first week. Never had a book sold that many copies in its first week. Author Kittie Kelley dug up all the dirt and scandal she could find to discredit the First Lady. I am not so much concerned about how much of it was accurate. What interests me is why 950,000 people would buy a book that is full of bad news about somebody. Why do we enjoy reading that kind of stuff? What is it about human nature that makes us feel better when we can bring others down?

Jealousy ruins relationships. According to the Bible, it causes conflict, kindles resentment, and makes a person miserable.

We read in Proverbs 27:4 “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?”

Proverbs 14:30 reminds us “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”

And we cannot ignore that it was jealousy that motivated the religious leaders to arrange the death of Jesus (see Matthew 27:18).

Enemies are created because of **pride**. Rick Warren shared that Proverbs 10:13 was the first verse that he and his wife Kay memorized as a married couple. It says, “Pride only breeds quarrels.” It is sad to think how many people are now enemies due to pride and ego rather than recognizing God’s grace and the importance of modeling that in their marriage.

I am sure that you have noticed that **rudeness** is on the rise. I believe the internet, email, and texting have made it easier for us to be rude to one another. I have shared this next true story with some of you already, but let me repeat it because it still hits me as being unbelievable. Many years ago, I was at a church social at a church in Cerritos. We were all enjoying the amusing stories we shared about our old neighborhoods and about some strange encounters with neighbors. One sweet congregant shared her plight when her mean, old neighbor took a garden hose and soaked her clothes that were drying on her clothes line. The story seemed so familiar to me that I asked where she lived. This happened in Compton on Pixley Avenue which is exactly where my grandparents lived. Come to find out, that mean old neighbor was my dear grandma who was sick and tired of her neighbor's pigeons flying overhead and pooping on her clean clothes as they hung on her clothes line. Needless to say, we shared an incredulous moment of realization. Then we had a good laugh over the incident. My grandparents were believers, but I think Grandma forgot to read 1 Corinthians 13:5 which says, "Love is not rude."

**Anger** is another characteristic that can ruin a relationship. Do you know any hot-tempered people? Do you remember the old statement about anger... "Whenever I lose my temper I lose." Danger is really the word anger with the letter "d" in front of it. Anger is dangerous and can result in an individual losing everything—his or her reputation, husband, wife, job...even good health.

Mistreatment can result in one harboring the bitter feeling of **resentment**. I once lost a job for what I perceived to be unfair. To be honest, I had a problem with resentment and I held a grudge until I participated in *Resentment Recovery*. This class cost me nothing because the Lord was my instructor. I was able to reach out to Him and release my resentment. Ultimately, He opened a different door and allowed me to step through it to a better job.

Unfortunately, people have experienced some heinous and abusive situations that have changed their lives. Some individuals may have made God their enemy for one reason or another. For instance, you may feel that God should have saved a loved one from a terrible disease. I certainly am no expert in this field and I know that you will have to follow God's path in order for you to heal.

I believe that Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross can give us some insight as a result of her journey. There was a man who had hurt her deeply early in her life. Years later, she was involved in his life again. Clara was

speaking about him to another person very kindly. The person said, “Wasn’t that the person who hurt you?” Barton said, “Yes, I distinctly remember forgetting that hurt.” It’s a choice. You can hold on to the hurt and let it turn to hate or let it go. Sometimes you need God’s supernatural power in order to let it go and be able to say, “It wasn’t good. And it wasn’t fun. It was bad. But I believe that God can even bring good out of the bad and somehow the rest of my life is going to be the best of my life.”

Like most of us, David endured many false accusations only on a much greater scale. There is much for us to learn in **Psalm 109** which, according to David Guzik, is a prophecy of vengeance against hateful enemies. This is a psalm of David and is thought to be the strongest of what are known as the “imprecatory psalms” in which David calls down curses upon his enemies. Many find his words too harsh for a man after God’s own heart. Some say Psalm 109 reveals nothing more than the humanity of David. Here is the overarching lesson for me in this psalm. David did not say **he** would take revenge. He gave the matter to God. He left vengeance up to God.

According to Warren W. Wiersbe, this psalm is built around three major requests which provide lessons for us:

In part 1 (verses 1-5), David called out to the Lord to do something! The silence of God indicated that the Lord was not answering his prayer. Oftentimes, we cry out to Him but nothing seems to happen. David reminded the Lord that he did not pray only when he needed help, for he praised the Lord often and thanked Him for His mercies (see verse 30; 22:25). Hopefully, we will be able to say that as well. **David responded to God’s silence and to the enemy’s attacks by praying to the Lord. His faith did not waiver.**

In part 2 of Psalm 109 (verses 6-20), David requested the Lord to judge the enemy (verses 6-20). David focused his prayer on the leader of the evil band that was attacking him, and he asked God to appoint a judge or prosecuting attorney as wicked as the defendant himself! **David expected the Lord to stand at his right hand to defend him** (see verse 31).

David’s enemy did not show kindness to the poor and he did not seek to be a blessing to others. **David believed all of this would come right back on the head of his enemy and penetrate his very being, for sinners hurt themselves far more than they hurt their victims.**

Part 3 of the psalm includes verses 21-31 in which David called upon the Lord to help him. He wanted God to do some wonderful thing that only God could do, and this would be a sign to his enemies that Jehovah was fighting David's battles.

David promised to praise the Lord and give glory to Him when all these trials were ended. After David had been made king over all Israel, he brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and sought to honor the Lord (2 Samuel 5-6). **God did help David in his stand against his enemies. In His own time and His own way, and God will do that for us.**

**The Book of Proverbs gives us specific instructions as to how we should treat our enemies. Here are a few:**

**16:7** “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies be at peace with him.”

**24:17** “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.”

**25:12-22** “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you.”

## **FRIENDSHIP**

Now that we have explored negative relationships, I want to turn to the happier subject of friendship. We know that relationships come in all shapes and sizes. What do you suppose is the biggest predictor of how we make friends – age, faith, politics, occupations, family, common interests?

People are most likely to be a friend with someone who has a similar background, upbringing, education, ethnicity, and age. It's easy to connect when you have similar commonalities. I remember meeting my new office mate in the District Office of the Garden Grove Unified School District. We shared an office for two weeks, but when we finally had time to talk about our roots, we discovered we attended the same high school (Dominguez in Compton). You know, the one that was in the news recently due to a fire that damaged the cafeteria. My office mate and I graduated in the same year which, of course, meant we were the same age. We had never run into one another. Once we

found out how much we had in common, we became fast friends because it was so easy to connect.

Relationships can also be rich and very beautiful when we connect with people who are from different generations, “tribes,” religions, homes, and have different upbringing. One such example is the relationship between Ruth, a Moabite, and Naomi an Israelite from Bethlehem. Somehow God had brought them together, and as result of Ruth’s loyalty and sacrificial care for Naomi, her mother-in-law, she met and married Boaz. Their son became the grandfather of King David. And Ruth, the Moabite, is listed in the genealogy of Jesus...amazing, right?

The friendship between David and Saul’s son Jonathan is equally as amazing. In 1 Samuel 18:1, we see that “Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself.” Jonathan made a covenant with David to remain BFFs. When the people began to applaud David’s exploits, Saul’s appreciation for David turned into a jealous rage. Saul attempted to kill David, but thanks to Jonathan, David was able to escape Saul’s wrath.

This friendship was mutual and David promised to never cut off kindness from Jonathan’s family (see 1 Samuel, chapter 20). Years later after Jonathan’s death, David demonstrated his commitment to that covenant. He invited Jonathan’s disabled son, Mephibosheth, into his palace to live where there was always a place at the king’s table for him. (See 2 Samuel 9).

I want to mention a less known friendship between David and his friend Ittai which is told in 2 Samuel 15. When times were good, King David had plenty of friends. Everyone wanted to spend time with a wise and successful king. But when times were bad, David found out who his true friends were. When David’s son, Absalom, made his move to overthrow his father’s government, David had to escape from Jerusalem in fear for his life.

As David watched his faithful supporters leave Jerusalem, Ittai the Gittite caught his eye. David couldn’t understand why this newly arrived foreigner should risk such loyalty to him. David told him to go back and make his future with the king, referring to Absalom. Ittai told David that is exactly what he planned to do. He would make his future with the king and that king was David.

We learn so much from these relationships as they resemble Jesus’ friendship with us. In each of these relationships, we find individuals who are

fully committed to their friends. They were loyal and caring and willing to pay the cost of their friendship. They were willing to put their friend's needs above their own. These are people who inspire me to be a better friend.

Here are some beautiful verses from Proverbs that give us more information about God's gift of friendship:

**17:17** "A friend loves at all times."

**18:24** "...A true friend sticks by you like family."

**27:9** "A sweet friendship refreshes the soul."

**27:17** "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

## APPLICATION

Since Jesus is our perfect example, let's focus on His words as we endeavor to learn and apply His lessons and become increasingly conformed to His image.

- 1) Jesus teaches us about the blessing of unity in John 17:20-23, Jesus petitioned God the Father with these words:

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."

**Lesson:** We are to live in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

- 2) The New Testament gives us specific instructions as to how we should treat our enemies:

Jesus said, "...I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45).

Jesus' words in Luke 6:27-28 are, "...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

**Lesson:** We are to love our enemies.

3) When it comes to friendship, Jesus says: "Greater love has no man than this, than one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

**Lesson:** Jesus loved us enough to give His life for us. We may not have to die for someone, but there are other ways to practice sacrificial love: listening, helping, encouraging, giving (especially your time).

4) Jesus is the best model for loving others. That's why He tells us to do as He does: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:12).

**Lesson: We must love others which includes forgiving others as Jesus forgives us.**

Sometimes we feel that we just can't forgive individuals who sin against us. That's why we need Jesus Christ. He can provide the power to forgive that nobody else can. He can heal that hurt that no one else can.

According to Rick Warren, "It all boils down to this: The quality of our relationship to God determines the quality of every other relationship we have."

This week let's give all the love we can and then give a little more. We can never out give Jesus who paid for each of us with His precious blood.

Let's pray and after the prayer, please stand to sing the Doxology.