

Cyber Truths By E-mail

29. Are Your Friendships Spiritually Authentic? (July 19, 2007)



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Dear Friends,

How *rarely* followers of Jesus in this country intentionally examine and weigh their relationships! People from other cultures have told us that typical “Anglo/American” relationships are “flat”. In other words, they all seem to be on a similar level of casualness, with little intensity or priority to distinguish them.

Please review the **Restoration Diagram** our Father gave us to explain the relational connectedness of the Hebraic Restoration based on *relational priorities*. Your Covenant relationship with our Father and His Son Jesus is the first and foremost relationship in your life. As you progress outward in the layers, the *priority* of the relationships decreases.

Followers of Jesus place extraordinary value, even unto death, on their ongoing relationship with our Father. Since Jesus is the Firstborn among those who have been adopted into our Father’s family, He is your role-model for living out our Father’s values through willing yieldness to His Spirit at work in you.

Repeatedly His Word urges you to “*find out what pleases Him.*” Consequently, your love relationship with Him will compel you to live in trusting obedience as He wants. Isn’t this *willing responsiveness* the intensity of love and obedience our Lord requires of us?

You could probably quote our Lord’s greatest command from memory:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).

That **love** is fleshed out on a daily basis by “*taking careful heed*” to the way you choose to live: “*to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul*” (Joshua 22:5). These are forceful commands from our God as we’re set apart to fulfill His Kingdom purposes and reach others with His truth.

We want to use this Teaching E-mail to help you scrutinize your relationships with others. Why is it important that you do this? Most of the 1,050 commands of God in the Newer Testament are written in a *plural* context. They’re intended for a family of people who know one another well to collectively help each other. For instance, Paul uses the plural of *you* and *your* in this directive:

...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12,13).

The Newer Testament writers were Hebraic in their understanding of *communal responsibility* to one another as called-out ones who follow Jesus: they would mutually help each other fulfill the will of God from hearts that desired to bring Him praise. With this value in mind, what kind of relationships do we need as His followers to “work out our salvation” through our obedient response to His Spirit in us?

We want to emphasize again the four criteria for biblical fellowship with others:

- 1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony** (1 Corinthians 10:31).



2. **Your fellowship with each other must spur you to grow in Christ's likeness** (see Philippians 2:12).
3. **Your shared fellowship must spur you toward repentance and the narrow gate** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. **Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must spur you to reveal Jesus to the lost in your daily lives** (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

If the people with whom you break bread aren't instruments of righteousness for each other in these ways, then you're falling far short of our Lord's call and purpose for your lives. So let's examine your relationships and see which ones are helping you walk in these fellowship parameters.

One way to look at relationships is to recognize how they're formed. From this perspective, relationships can be partitioned into three groups: Value-based Relationships, Positional-based Relationships, and Activity-based Relationships.

Value-based Relationships

Your positive emotions are generally attached proportionally to those people you value the most. From the time you are born in spirit from above, the basis for your relationships must change if you're going to follow Jesus and be transformed into His likeness.

This new relational value system is revealed as Jesus describes His true family:

But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50).

In order to experience value-based relationships, you have to make significant relational choices. As a result of choosing to wholeheartedly love and obey our Lord, you'll be attracted to others who place comparable value on their relationship with Him.

Because of the value you place on your love relationship with our Father and your desire to please Him, you'll hunger to find others of a like love that's worked out in obedient trust. When you do encounter these brothers and sisters, these relationships grow into the sweetest fellowship.

Value-based relationships in Christ are the strongest and most enduring. They also bring the greatest glory to our Father! If you're a parent, these are the type of relationships your children need to see you sharing in so that they can begin to base their own relationships on your example.

Value-based relationships strengthen and encourage you to reach out to unbelievers with a different loving design and purpose than the world offers. And as you walk according to the Spirit, you'll be far less likely to compromise with the world's ways and values in those relationships.

Positional-based Relationships

Unlike value-based relationships that call you to make conscious choices of those with whom you intentionally become close, people are *set into* positional relationships. For instance, all of us were born into a particular family. You weren't given a chance to choose your relatives or the circumstances of where or when you were born.

This reality has important bearing on your spiritual walk. People who fail to examine and biblically question the doc-

trine of the denomination in which they were raised make their religious expression *positional* rather than value-based.

Family members who use the phrase, “Blood is thicker than water”, are reaffirming their positional relationship. As an example:

A mother can cause needless tension in her son’s marriage by emphasizing *her* position in his life rather than by “decreasing” so that the value relationship he has with the wife he’s chosen can increase. This is a biblical and necessary relational shift:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

A father whose spiritual life reveals no *heart determination* for the things of God is modeling for his children a positional relationship that will make it harder for them to understand the intimate Fatherhood of God. They may acquire knowledge *about* God from him, but they’ll miss the sacrificial, loving devotion that will stir them to press on in an ongoing, lifelong journey in Jesus.

If you’ve been heavily influenced by positional-based family relationships, you’ll probably find it difficult to grasp what following Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength encompasses in His Spirit. You’ll also be reluctant to follow through in establishing value-based relationships with others who are loving and obedient living sacrifices acceptable to our Father (see Romans 12:1).

Those within your realm of positional relationships often perceive your value-based relationships as a threat to the stronghold-influenced order and controls already being practiced within

your family. As they see you attempting to flee the bondage of obligatory religious practice, they may voice concern that you’re “joining a cult” or “forgetting your roots.”

These restraints are likely to be emanating from generations of iniquity that feels good about ritual and tradition but resists the transformation that would come from yieldedness to the Holy Spirit. Giving way to the positional captivity of generational iniquity is the wide, easy road, especially if you fear confrontation of any kind (see Lifebytes 40 and 41.)

Yet responding to His call of intimacy and obedience is a choice He has empowered His own to walk in daily. Being set apart in holiness may indeed threaten your accusers. But your humility to love them even as you refuse to compromise may also be the means by which the Spirit penetrates their resistance.

Activity-based Relationships

Relationships that form because of common activities pervade western Christendom. Church services, Bible studies and Sunday schools that focus on *content dissemination* rather than developing strong relationships to help each other walk out that truth are all activity-based. The activity, not the relational fellowship, is the primary reason for gathering.

Heavy focus on activity insidiously blocks out your ability to establish value-based relationships. Activity-based programs within congregations are the most efficient to manage. Only a few leaders are needed to direct the activities of the many. Yet the many suffer by never maturing as a family of brothers and sisters that Jesus identified as His — those who trust Him and do the will of His Father in an ongoing basis in their daily lives.

Committed Friendships Bring About Willingness to Change

Another way to look at your relationships is to scrutinize the *depth of commitment* you have with each other.

When Mike was asked to speak with various congregations, he'd often survey the people using the *Discerning Levels of Friendship* indicators, below. Over 95% of respondents never got beyond a Level 2 relationship — Casual Friendship. *No one* had a Level 4 relationship with anyone else in their congregation!

If you want *Intimate Friendship & Fellowship* in your relationships, several rudiments must have taken place in a your life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit there must have occurred:

1. **Complete repentance resulting in a clear conscience.** (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38)

2. **A distinct reduction of fear of man accompanied by a humble, vulnerable openness to input.** (1 John 4:18,19; Matthew 10:28; James 4:6; Ephesians 4:1,2)

3. **A strong, responsive desire to bear fruit for the glory of God** (Matthew 3:8; 7:16; John 15:1,2)

4. **A noticeable wholeheartedness about the things of God, and a trusting obedience to the will of God.** (Mark 12:30; Matthew 7:21-27)

With these four criteria in place, you then need an intentional agreement with each other in order to have a Level 4 relationship. In essence, you're establishing a covenant with each other, with transformation into the character of Jesus Christ as your ongoing goal for one another's lives as you cooperate with the

DISCERNING LEVELS OF FRIENDSHIP

[from the Institute in Basic Life Principles Seminar]

Level of Friendship

1. ACQUAINTANCE

Distinguishing Characteristics

Based on occasional contact;
Freedom to ask general questions: public information

2. CASUAL FRIENDSHIP

Based on common interests, activities, and concerns;
Freedom to ask specific questions: opinions, ideas, wishes, goals

3. CLOSE FRIENDSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

Based on mutual life goals;
Freedom to suggest mutual projects toward reaching life goals

4. INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

Based on commitment to each other's Christ-like character development; Freedom to correct each other

Let's draw a comparison between the above levels of friendship and our earlier discussion of value-based, position-based, and activity-based relationships:

- Intimate Friendship & Fellowship - - - - -> Value-based Relationships
- Close Friendship & Fellowship> Positional or Activity-based Relationships
- Casual Friendship> Positional or Activity-based Relationships
- Acquaintance> Positional or Activity-based Relationships

Holy Spirit. This relational responsibility of true biblical fellowship as a brother or sister in Christ calls for a deep level of commitment both to our Lord and to each other.

Marriages and home fellowship families that don't share a Level 4 relationship are hindering themselves from fully serving the Kingdom interests of Jesus. They'll be habitually reluctant to be transformed into His character, choosing instead to yield to their fleshly nature and compromise with the world's ways and values.

And, they'll be ineffectual in revealing Jesus-in-the-flesh to those who need to encounter the true Gospel of the Covenant. Their faith practices will allow them to feel comfortable alongside others of like lukewarmness but fail to spur them on to glorify their Lord in loving, Kingdom service.

- **List the important people in your life. Indicate what level of friendship you have with each.**

Person	Level of Friendship
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- **If you have no Level 4 friendships, why is this? Are you content with the levels of friendship you have with these individuals? Yes or No? If no, how can you change the nature of your relationships?**

- **Evaluate your current spiritual relationships. Are there people you value in the way Jesus described as brother, sister, mother? If there are, how do these individuals fulfill the fellowship criteria we listed on pages 1 and 2?**

- **What activities would you be willing to relinquish in order to develop value-based relationships with those He puts in your path to be spiritual family? In other words, if you found others willing to fellowship with you, would you be willing to forfeit everything to join them on your collective life journey in Jesus?**

- **Are you, your family, and those with whom you fellowship iniquity-free? Yes or No? If no, what do you purpose to do about it?**
