

Sunday, February 2, 2020

Proverbs 18:24

Ephesians 6:18-20

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

John 15:12-15

The New You Relationally

The New You- this has been our theme for the last few weeks, so do you feel 'new'? Maybe you are redefining who you are after hearing the possibilities of living 2020 in a new direction! Who is the NEW YOU? The new you is the you God intended you to be and become. We have reflected on the New You- spiritually, physically, emotionally, financially and today our focus is on the area of our life that is foundational to living as human. As people we need and rely on other people. From the moment we are born, we need the love, care and attention of our parents because infants cannot survive on their own. Babies need to be held, feel the skin of another human and to be fed and nurtured properly. This is what is important as we grow up but how do we know about developing relationships and keeping them strong. Proverbs 18:24 states "Some people play at friendship but a true friend stays closer than one's kin (or family)."

Just how are you doing in your relationships? That is the way we interact with people family friends, co workers, church friends? How do you show respect, love and care for each other? What we say or do will make a difference in how we feel about others and how we grow as people connecting with others.

This is a story called "The Two Friends" Two good and close friends were talking and singing together as they walked through the forest. Suddenly a bear appears before them and they are afraid. The first friend quickly climbs up a tree to safety. The second friend did not know how to climb a tree and needed help to do so. But his friend had already left him on his own to face the bear. He was very scared because the bear was big and strong and could easily kill him. He thought hard about what to do and remembered what he had been taught about bears. So he laid down on the ground, slowed down his breath pretending that he was dead. The bear came close to him and sniffed and smelt his body all over. And then the bear walked away thinking that the man was dead. When the bear went back into the woods, the first friend then came down from the tree and seeing his friend laying on the ground he went up to him and asked if he was all right. He even asked Are you ok? Just what did the bear tell you?

The second friend thought for a while. "The bear told me never to trust a friend who escapes and leaves you alone when you need him most," he said. The friend got up and headed back home alone. The first friend realised his mistake, was ashamed of his behaviour and followed quietly. How do we define good relationships and bad relationships? Who are your good friends?

Many years ago children would start school and meet other children in their classes. The children would continue together throughout their elementary school years. Several of them would continue into their high school years and remain friends. Today young people often move several times during their formative years and often do not have the opportunity to make friends outside of school settings. The alternative to this is that they have specific friends with whom they have specific interests. People they know because they play hockey, baseball, yoga or dance. So when it comes time to have weddings I have seen wedding parties with 16-18 young people who really don't know each other but have the one friend in common. So there is in some situations 6-7 best friends!

In contrast to this are people who live in cities and do not know anyone other than those with whom they work. There are many lonely people and this is not good for one's well being. Loneliness is a sign that you don't have the friends you need in your life. The people who will strengthen you, support you and help you grow. Even though we live in a city, crowded loneliness exists- one may be surrounded by thousands of people but they feel all alone. Loneliness is not God's intention for your life and it is important for individuals have other people who care about you, who pray for you, who challenge you, who push you to become more like Jesus, who really want God's best for you. And who care about you as a friend in Christ. This is why the church continues to draw people together. We need each other to lift each other up, to care for each other when we are down, to share and learn and grow together. We need each other so that we might relate to people effectively and to encourage each other.

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica stating: "Encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing." The church was doing well as a place where relationships were being built because people cared, encouraged and built each other up. How do you encourage others- not only with church friends but others? The number one way that we encourage or discourage others is in the words we speak. Words are powerful- either as a tool to build or a weapon to destroy? Are you an encourager through what you say?

What about by what you do? What kinds of things do you do to encourage others? Write special notes, sharing concerns over coffee or simply serve someone in an unexpected way. And how do you listen to others? Not only are to speak words, we are to also listen to others as they share- vent, get angry, cry, whatever. Listening to others is a way of caring and being in a good relationship.

When was the last time you had fun with those you are in relationship? That is to enjoy something in common with each other. OF course we all connect to one another in different ways. Studies show that women are more verbal than men but it is important to talk, be and enjoy each others' company doing something in common. Yesterday morning I came over to the church as the chili was being prepared. I smelled the spices and the meat cooking as I walked down the hall. But what I heard first was talking and laughter. What a joy this was to hear people interacting with each other cooking together and having fun. They were truly encouraging each other and as a result we will have a great lunch today!

To experience the New You relationally we need to pray for friends. Praying is one of the most personal and meaningful actions you can do for friends. Pray for them by name, for specifically what they are going through at the time, to pray for their understanding of God, to pray for their health, finances, relationships, career, family members. But how do we pray? As we read from Ephesians 6, we are to pray all the time anytime and be persistent in prayers. For what happens when we pray? Your prayer will be heard by God and God will answer your pray. As you pray, God's presence bears on the situations in another person's life and your prayer strengthens the friendship you have with the other individual. The Spirit in your life meets the Spirit in the other person and you draw closer together. And mean it when you say, "I'll pray for you." Make a note on your phone, write it down on paper—to pray for the one whom you said you would pray for. And if they are not a part of your church family of friends, pray that they will come and grow in faith along with you.

Another aspect of being the new you relationally is to share your thoughts, beliefs and faith. Do you know your friends well enough to understand their faith perspective of life? Think about a person you are friends with; do you know what faith they have? Have you ever talked about it? Do you know where they stand- it can be weird at first, but good relationships don't hesitate to talk about God because they know how important it is. They understand the eternal consequences involved. Don't be obnoxious though—did you know there is lettuce on your tooth, and by the way Jesus died for you are you a Christian believer? Start by praying for others, encouraging others, and building each other up and sharing your faith.

The New You may not be a stretch relationally for you because you already encourage and build each other up so well. But may be praying for others whom you are not as close to, who are not clear in their faith intentions or who wonder about you and your need for Jesus in your life. But the New You builds upon relationships so that all may grow in faith together. This is the purpose of a church- growing in faith, growing in hope and sharing the love we have for God as we worship Jesus. The New You calls us to focus on ourselves before we reach out. Let us be mindful of this as we renew our faith and share our love for others in Jesus' name.

As we sing WOULD YOU BLESS, let us be prayerful in thought asking God to bless us as we share with others in hope. Amen.