

One Month to Live
Mending Relationships
Matthew 18
3/6/16

- This morning, I want to take a quick poll. I want to find out who thinks they are extroverts and who thinks they are introverts. Maybe you have taken a personality assessment and you know what you are.
 - If not, an extrovert is someone who is energized being around people. They might like alone time, but like it in small doses because they like being around people more than being alone. Extroverts seek interaction with others.
 - I am an extrovert. It doesn't mean that I don't like alone time, but I am energized being around people. When I was a kid if I was in my room by myself for a longer length of time (meaning an hour or so), I would come out saying, "Mom! Where are you?" I didn't necessarily want anything. I just needed to check in because I draw energy from interactions.
 - An introvert is someone who is energized being alone. It's not that they don't like people or relationships, but being around people for long periods of time can be draining and withdrawing into some alone time re-energizes them.
 - So, raise your hand if you think or know you are an extrovert? Ok, who thinks they are an introvert?

- Regardless of what kind of personality we have – whether extrovert or introvert, we were created to be in relationships. They are foundational to life itself. It doesn't really matter if you are an introvert or an extrovert, humans can't live apart from relationships.
 - In the 13th century, Emperor Frederick, the ruler of the Roman Empire, employed researchers to carry out a rather crude and very cruel experiment. See, he wanted to know what man's original language was: Hebrew, Greek, or Latin?
 - So, he decided to isolate a few infants from the sound of the human voice. He reasoned that they would eventually speak the natural tongue of man. Obviously, they didn't know that language development is learned, it is not innate or instinctual.
 - Wet nurses who were sworn to absolute silence were obtained, and though it was difficult for them, they abided by the rule. The infants never heard a word -- not a sound from a human voice. Within several months they were all dead.

- That experiment shows how we can only live in relationship. That was God’s design. Being in relationship with us is why God created humanity to begin with. Jesus sets the example for us about how to live in relationship. Jesus always did life with others in a meaningful and powerful way.
 - The relational heart of God can be seen in Mark 12 when Jesus is asked which commandment is the greatest. Jesus answered that there are two that are equally important. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind & Love your neighbor as yourself.
 - Jesus said there is nothing more important than these. In fact, every commandment hinges on those two commands. Everything that God has ever said is hinged on relationships. Every one of the 10 commandments are relational in nature. He cares very deeply about our relationship with him and our relationships with others.

- Yet, we all have relationships in our lives that are not what they should be. God’s design for relationships is that we pour goodness into each other: encouragement, love, prayer, support and accountability.
 - But it seems that very few of us have these kinds of relationships. There are people, maybe many people, in this room who have relationships that are broken and torn apart.
 - Some have family relationships that are splintered. Relationships with mom and dad that are scarred with one big argument and they’ve never been the same. Marriages that are struggling. Friendships that are no longer. A family member that you don’t talk to anymore. People you have had a falling out with.

- In this sermon series, we have been examining how our lives would change if we had just one month to live. The central question we have been challenged to ask ourselves is: **How would your life be different if today you knew that you only had one month to live?** We’ve said that if we knew we were dying, we would live much, much differently.
 - That’s how we are supposed to live – like we are dying. Like Jesus did.
 - This is what prompted King David to write our key verse that we’ve been looking at: Psalm 39:4-5 *“Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered — how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath.”*
 - The theme passage of this series is actually a prayer of David. Let’s all pray the first sentence in this prayer together.
 - This is a reality we need to be aware of every day so we can choose to live life to its full. In fact, show your neighbor how long their life is on this earth - “Width of a man’s hand.”
 - If you are sitting beside someone with a large hand, you are very fortunate!
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- Knowing that our time on earth is brief, we need to spend our time wisely. This church is all about helping you find out what you need to be doing with your life and to share that with others. That's why our purpose statement is to "Share the PEACE of Christ." If we are people of the peace of Christ who share the peace of Christ, we will know full life and be doing exactly what we were created to do.
 - o That purpose statement is meant transform our lives and our relationships with both God and others. It is relational at its very core.

- Because here's the thing. Yes, our world needs peace. But, more personally, we all need peace. We need peace in our lives and especially in our relationships. Think of this: is there some person who when you think of them, all you think of is the bitterness? And is that person someone whom you know you really should be close to or someone whom you once were close to? What happened to the peace?
 - o And, I would just bet that if we knew that we only had one month to live, a big chunk of that time would be investing in relationships and in making things right with some people, mending relationships, reaching out to some folk that we haven't reached out to in a while, even forgiving some people.

- But, why wait? Since our life is brief and our purpose is clear, why wait? Last week, we saw how we shouldn't delay in doing what God wants us to do and giving him full control.
 - o Do you really think God wants you to have that kind of relationship as a Child of God? Does He really want you to walk in bitterness? Do you think he really wants you to have awkward relationship and to accept division, especially among those of us who claim Jesus as Lord?
 - o Have you just come to accept divisions and strife between you and certain people? Have you come to accept a lack of peace and disharmony in certain relationships with people?
 - o I don't think that should be so. When I read God's Word, I see something different in how we are to live in relationship with one another. As people of peace, we can't accept those divisions.

- Because this is what I read in Scripture: Colossians 3:15 is the theme verse for our purpose statement "Sharing the PEACE of Christ." It says, "And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."
 - o Ephesians 4:3 says, "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."
 - Make every effort comes from a verb that I can't pronounce which means strive eagerly and earnestly. Give it all you have!

- How many have ever seen the *Taken* movies? I think there have been three of them. It's about a family where various family members keep getting kidnapped

and then the other family members fight some terrorist bad guys to get back their kidnapped family member.

- The thing is that in the first movie, the family relationship is strained. The mother and father are divorced. The daughter is disconnected. But, they love each other enough to do whatever it takes to get each other back. They are willing to sacrifice their own lives for the life of their family member.
 - This is what God wants you to do for PEACE in your relationships. And, he doesn't want you to wait until some terrorist bad guy kidnaps someone before you do something to get that relationship back. **God is Calling You to Fight for Peace – now!**
- See, during this series, we are not only looking at how our life would be different if we lived like we were dying, but we are looking at how Jesus, the Prince of Peace, lived when he knew he was going to die as the sacrifice for our sins. He set the ultimate example. So, we have specifically been looking at what Jesus did in the last month of his life as he walked very deliberately toward his death.
- Jesus, in two of his final teachings with his disciples, spoke of how to live in relationship with one another very specifically. This morning, we are going to look at Matthew 18. This is a teaching that Jesus shared with his disciples shortly before arriving in Jerusalem where his life would end and ours would begin.
 - The whole chapter of Matthew 18 is about fighting for peace in your relationships. In looking at this chapter, we find that Jesus gives us three things we must do to fight for peace. In fact, let's turn to Matthew 18.
- The first is: **Confront Humbly**. Jesus never says that there won't or shouldn't be disagreements or conflict in relationships. These things should be confronted. But, they need to be done humbly.
- The disciples weren't thinking about humility when they asked Jesus in Matthew 18:1 who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. But, Jesus put them in their place quickly.
 - He called a little child. A little child was probably one that was less than 5 years old, maybe a toddler. And, he told them "unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven."
- You have to be as humble as a little child. Josiah told me a story of a conflict that happened between him and a friend this past week. He told me that his friend, Mathew, wasn't listening to what he was saying. So, Josiah yelled in his ear.
- This, of course, made Mathew mad and Mathew told Josiah that he wasn't going to listen to him or think anything that Josiah says is funny anymore and he didn't want to play with him.

- Josiah told Mathew that hurt his feelings and that he didn't want to play with Mathew anymore since Mathew said that to him. Mathew told Josiah that Josiah hurt his feelings, too.
 - Then, Josiah said, "We both started crying and we didn't like that we made each other cry. So, we decided to turn our behavior and attitude around just be friends again."
 - We could learn a lot from the humility of a child. While our adult reactions and conversations may be a little more...adult-like, at its core, this is how we are to confront – with honesty and above all, with humility.
- Then, Jesus goes on share another way that we confront humbly in Matthew 18:15-20. He says that if another believer sins against you, to go to them individually so that you might win them back. If they don't listen, take a couple witnesses to help you work it out and meditate. If they still don't listen and are still living in sin, bring it before the church. That is humble confrontation.
- Instead, what typically happens? We talk about the person behind their back to whoever will listen! We rally the troops to our side so we can have back-up for when we wage war! There is no humility in that!
 - Instead we are to confront with their interests at heart so that we might win them back! We know when we have someone's best interests at heart when we think, "How would I want to be confronted and treated in this situation." That will win them back in relationship with you.
- Jesus also tells us that we confront humbly when we do it now and not wait for emotions to boil. In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus says, "So if you are presenting a sacrifice[Ⓜ] at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.
- This may be one of the most overlooked commands of Jesus by today's Christian. Jesus is saying that you can't really worship God and spend time with him if you have a relationship that is not what it should be and you need to deal with it immediately to fix the problem.
 - Time on this earth is short, so do it NOW. ACCORDING TO JESUS – if you're avoiding confrontation, you're hindering your relationship with God. Doing the right thing in this area just may open up so many wonderful things for you simply b/c it opens up your relationship with God.
- Now all of this is tough because by nature, most don't like confrontation. If someone likes confrontation, that's a whole other issue to deal with!
- And most of us don't do it well because we go by what our human nature tells us to do or what is acceptable in society. And, you don't hear confronting humbly, like a child, with someone else's best interests at heart or to do it immediately from society.

- Instead, we offend. We can be crass. We get folks involved that never needed to be involved. We make things bigger than they need to be. We point, we blame, we shame. We only think about our side of the situation. We get defensive. We spend more time talking or thinking about what we are going to say than we do listening to the other person.
- But, Jesus wants us to truly fix that relationship by confronting humbly. Don't let the confrontation be about who's right and wrong. Let it be about how much you have to gain by making the relationship right. Go to them with a humble spirit – know that God is the ONLY judge perfect enough to keep score.
 - You might be thinking, "But I just know they won't be open to it and it won't make any difference." Well, NOT WITH FAITH LIKE THAT! Plus, it's really not about them...it's about you. Have you done everything that Jesus would have you to do?
 - They might not be open to it, but that's on them. At least you did what Jesus did and what he wants you to do. Trust that Jesus will prepare their hearts so that you might win back the relationship.
- In your bulletin, there's an insert on fighting for peace and you'll find a place that says, "Who do I need to humbly confront."
 - Maybe it's a family member or co-worker or former friend. Maybe it's someone in the church. Fill in the blank. Pray. Humble yourself and do it now to restore the relationship.
- The second thing Jesus tell us to do to fight for peace is to **Forgive Irrationally**. This kind of irrational forgiveness is seen in Matthew 18:21-22 which says, "Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"
 - Then, Jesus goes to share a story about a king who forgave the huge debt of one of his servants, but that servant went out and threw another guy in prison for not being able to pay him back the small amount owed. The king heard of this and was angry and threw his servant in jail.
 - Jesus concluded with, "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."
- We aren't just to tolerate someone. We are to forgive them as Jesus forgave us – without expectation or condition. *Colossians 3:13 (NIV)* says "*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"
 - Here's the Jesus stuff that we have a hard time with. We like when Jesus loves us and forgives us, but we don't really like when we are to do the same. You might be thinking, "Okay, I'm down with Jesus forgiving, but I have a problem with this verse. It's the word "whatever.""
 - Are we really to forgive "whatever" has been done to us?

- From a human perspective, I'll be honest. I think that's irrational. I've had some pretty good hurts in my life. I've had some people be pretty dirty to me over the years. I think I may have said before that I've been hurt more deeply from Christian church folk than out in the world folk.
 - o The most painful for me is when my "good" has been "evil spoken of." You try to do good and then people slander you. People gossip. Some outright tell baseless lies. And I'm supposed to just forgive this? 490 times according to Jesus?

- But as I think of this command to forgive, my heart really turns to some of you out there because I know that many of you have been injured deeply by another.
 - o Gossip, slander...okay that's tuff. But some of you have been abused: verbally, physically, sexually...
 - o How do you get to the place where you can just look at that person or in your heart think about that person and say, "You're forgiven"?
 - o Even more, how do you get to the place where you forgive as Jesus forgave you? He forgave 100% - no judgment – no questions asked – no limitations – 100% immediate. How do you do that?

- Just like humbly confronting is not to prove who is right and who is wrong, forgiveness is not for their healing. It's for mine! It's for yours!
 - o You see, holding a grudge is hard work. It's like carrying a bag of pain, heartache, memory around on your back every day of your life. We just completed a sermon series on Got Junk? Unforgiveness is junk that you are carrying around that affects your life and affects what God can give you.
 - o Every time God tries to put something good into your life, you cannot take it because you're still holding on to the weight of past hurts. God can't bless you with wholeness or anything because your hand and heart are too busy holding on to past hurts.

- Unforgiveness is poisonous bitterness that keeps you from receiving all that God has for you DAILY. Maybe you have heard the expression that harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. In reality, you are the one slowly dying because it affects your relationship with God and with others.
 - o How many benefits have you missed out on because you are holding on to bitterness? How many new relationships have been affected because you didn't forgive the old? How many new blessings have you dropped because you couldn't forgive the curses?

- On the insert in your bulletin, there is another question with some blank spaces that says, "Who do I need to forgive irrationally?" To us, this side of heaven, it is always going to be irrational. Jesus forgave irrationally.

- You know, we've been looking at the last 30 days of Jesus' life, but what if you look at the last 30 hours? Jesus is arrested, betrayed, taken to court & found guilty, beaten beyond recognition, crown of thorns jammed in his head, forced to carry a cross uphill, spikes slammed in his hands/feet, spit on...
 - WHAT DID HE SAY? **"Father, forgive them..."** That, folks is irrational. Yet, God is whole and complete because he chooses to forgive. When we forgive, we will find that, we then, have the ability to be whole again.
- Finally, Jesus was able to forgive irrationally because he loved deeply. This is also the final, but probably most important way the we fight for peace. We must **Love Deeply**.
 - 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other."
 - In Matthew 18:12-14, Jesus gives us an example of loving deeply. Let's read it together.
 - When we are willing to pursue relationships to heal them, to make things right, to forgive, to confront humbly when necessary, it is because we love deeply. We don't want people to perish and we don't want relationships to perish because we love deeply and we will fight for peace.
 - It's another thing that Jesus did that he calls us to do. In John 13:34 Jesus tells his followers, "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."
 - To love like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus - that's straight up tuff. About the time I'm ready to say, "It's just over with this guy." I hear Jesus saying, "Do you think I'd give up on him?" And, sometimes, I just want to ignore what Jesus is saying. But, who of us here can afford to ignore what Jesus is saying?
 - LOVE is so important because the power of LOVE is actually greater than the power of all of the WRONG that happened. The power of Jesus' love compelled him to confront us in our sin. The power of Jesus' love compelled him to forgive us of those sins.
 - When we love like Jesus, we are compelled to do the same. It will compel us to fight for peace. It will then, set us free to really live.
 - The final question on your insert – who do I need to love deeply? Then, ask God to fill your heart with that love.
 - This morning, if you only had one month to live, would you use it to hold a grudge? Would you allow important relationships to stay strained? Would you let unforgiveness poison those last 30 days?

- Don't go one more day with your heart, your life and your relationships being plagued, affected, even poisoned by unforgiveness, unresolved conflict and hatred in your heart for someone.
 - Set yourself free to really live!
- The Carnegie Technological Institute has stated that 90% of all people who fail in their life's vocation fail because they cannot get along with people. These people fail in their profession because they cannot get along with people.
- I would say it is the same for life. We will fail at life if we cannot get along with people. If we fail to confront humbly, love deeply, and forgive irrationally, we will never truly get along with people. We will always walk among a field of broken relationships.
- This morning, who needs to work on relationships? If you don't have a relationship with Jesus, it will keep you from ever being able to experience wholeness in other relationships. Lay down your baggage and take on a relationship with the One who loves you deeply, who wants to forgive you irrationally and who will confront you humbly when you need it.
- If you know Jesus, he is calling us to truly be his followers in how we relate to others. As he relates to us, we are to do the same. Don't fail at life because you refused to follow your Savior into life's fullness and healed relationships.
 - Don't put off what you would do if you only had one month to live.