

Melva's Corner

RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS!

June 6, 2005

Bible Text: I John 4:20 Mark 12:31

Central Truth: Your personal fulfillment depends on your ability to manage and nurture healthy relationships.

When the crowds asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.” That raised no eyebrows and rocked no boats. It was merely the familiar ancient **Shema**, which ended all synagogue meetings.

The crowd nodded in agreement. It was comfortably abstract. And as long as loving God is an abstraction aimed at no target in particular, we are all OK. Ho-hum religion. Business as usual.

But then Jesus added a line. **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Mark 12:31)

Oops! Things changed. Hackles went up. Now, wait a minute. Everything was fine like it was. “Love God” has a nice ring to it. Sounds religious. And it can be kept comfortably abstract. But that added line from Jesus dispelled the vagueness and slammed the abstract down onto the concrete. Now Jesus had gone and targeted that teaching. He’d made it practical. He’d aimed it at real people.

As long as loving God is one of those vague abstractions, we are all OK. We can put on and take off our religion like we do our Sunday clothes. We can set our faith up on the shelf beside our dusty family Bible and still feel holy. But when Jesus targeted that teaching, well, things got practical and personal.

The way Jesus put it, our love for God is expressed, not in pews, pulpits, and stained-glass tones, but in relationships with people — in the way you and I get along with him and her and them. If

being with God on Sunday doesn't make us better at being with people on Monday, then we've missed the point. Real Christianity shines in right relationships.

The grist of Christianity is ground out in the mill of marriages, friendships, partnerships, neighborhoods, communities, property lines, and sales contracts. Or to simplify it, if we really love God, the first ones to benefit will be family, friends, and neighbors.

Hmm. That complicates things a bit, especially when you think about our neighbors! Grumpy ones. Mean ones. Lazy ones. Bosses who demand the impossible. Secretaries who can't perform the minimal. Wives who don't appreciate what wonderful husbands they have. Husbands who think they are too wonderful. Relating to people with "the Jesus touch" is easier said than done. As the old saying goes,

To live above with those we love, now that will be glory. But to live below with those we know, is quite a different story.

We come into the world in families. Then we must fit into society, schools, and other organizations. And as Stephen Covey says, "We must interact with others for success to come to us in any personally effective way." Covey cites a study conducted by the Carnegie Institute that found that 60 to 80 percent of job dismissals in the business industry are caused by social problems, and only 20 to 40 percent are due to technical incompetence. In other words, most firings were because of relationship trouble. This study showed that in the field of engineering, only 15 percent of one's success is due to technical knowledge; the other 85 percent is due to one's ability to get along with other people. What does all this mean? It means that not merely your success, but also your personal fulfillment depends on your ability to manage and nurture healthy relationships. But it sure seems hard for us to get along with each other.

Doing right by people should be the Christian's forte'. Isn't our mission the same as Jesus' mission? Touching people? Didn't John say, "**For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen**"? (I John 4:20)

So we come to an important personal question: How are your relationships? Think for just a minute about the people in your

world. Some are in your life by choice: your mate, your best friend, perhaps a business associate. Others you inherited by chance: your relatives, your next-door neighbor, maybe your boss. But no matter how you became connected with them, they all have one thing in common:

They are vulnerable and woundable people who need someone to love them unconditionally — just like you and I do!

Could you use a little help in doing right by people? I guess we all could.

The plan?

Simple. Jesus will be our coach. We will track down the way Jesus treated people and we'll learn the art of relationship from the Master. We're going to learn from Jesus how to treat people! Stay tuned more to come in future messages.

Memory Text:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:31)