

How God Makes Men

Jesus: The Principle of Building Relationships

Mark 14:31, 1:17, 3:13-14, John 13:34-35, Acts 4:13

Good morning, men! You may know what your mission is, the question is what is it that's going to get you where you want to go? Or maybe you don't know what your mission is and how are you going to be able to attach yourself to a mission that will give you that sense of significance, that sense of meaning and purpose. This morning I want us to look at how Jesus fulfilled his mission. The series is *How God Makes Men*. We want to start off with a shout out this morning to the Williamston Church of Christ of Williamston, NC. There's a men's group there now meeting weekly using the video Bible Studies and Archie Gilmer is the leader of that group. Would you join me in giving these men a warm Man in the Mirror welcome? One, two, three, hoorah!

The Emphasis On Relationships

The title of the message today is Jesus: the principle of building relationships. Now isn't that interesting? I said we're going to talk about how Jesus fulfilled his mission as a template or example of how you can fulfill your mission, or how you can attach yourself to somebody else's mission that's going somewhere. But the principle is building relationships. How is that going to work? Let's look at the emphasis that Jesus put on relationships. Mark 1:17. He's walking along the Sea of Galilee and sees Andrew fishing. He says:

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

So Jesus when he started his ministry started first with building relationships. Very interesting! Turn to Mark 3:13:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

We all know that Jesus gathered around him some relationships and then these men spent the next three and a half years living, eating, praying, working, fasting, and ministering together. Turn now to John 13:34. We're skipping over now many years of them being together, and Jesus, right up at the time of predicting Peter's denial of him, he says:

"A new command I give you: All men will know you are my disciples if you perfect your theology..."

It's very interesting that theology is extremely important, you can't afford to compromise on truth. Truth is extremely important, but Jesus didn't say that. He said they would know we are his disciples if we perfect our relationships! He said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

It's the power of loving one another that enables Jesus to fulfill his mission. Let's back all the way up to the starting point when God was thinking about hurling the stars into existence. Flicking his fingers against the curtain of the night and arraying the cosmos with planets and suns and galaxies. Before there was anything there was just God. But God was not alone, God was with himself because God is a relationship. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, from eternity past, long before the creation enjoyed their trinity, their love relationship with each other. The purpose of the creation was to extend this relationship because God decided that he wanted to create a people for himself. I will be your God and you will be my people. You see, salvation is a relationship.

During my day, I'm not worshipping God in every moment, but almost! Most people have a running conversation with themselves. It's a smart idea for a Christian to have a running conversation with Jesus instead of always talking to yourself, talk to him! Because salvation is a relationship! What is the main thing that is always happening in the world? Anybody remember? God is sovereignly what? Orchestrating all human events. Why? To bring us into a right relationship with God and each other! That's it! That's what God is doing! What is the plot of the Bible? If you read the Bible from beginning to end, it's this Holy God who is a loving father who is relentlessly pursuing a relationship with his children! That's it! That's the plot of the Bible! Because salvation is a relationship!

Even the mission is a relationship. It's not a task, the mission is a relationship. God is seeking to bring you and me into a relationship, and once we're there, to bring others to a relationship. Salvation is a relationship with God! We see this emphasis on relationships from the very beginning. From the very beginning, the mission that God sent Jesus on was to build a team. God sent Jesus to build a team, and from the very beginning, we just looked at the verses, he called these men to be with him, to follow him, to build him into their lives. Towards the end, he reminds them that this is how people will know you are my disciples, love one another. How did it work out? Let's go to Acts 4:13. We're barely touching the tip of the iceberg here, but I want to show you from beginning to end how it worked out. This is when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin and it says:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

They had been in a relationship with Jesus. It worked! How effective was it? It's very interesting! In Mark 14:31, let's see what it says. There are many ups and downs both before and after this, but because Jesus made his mission this principle of building relationships so that he loved his disciples and he built this sense of them returning his love, how it ended up is this (this is after Jesus told Peter he was going to deny him):

But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

Interesting! That's the power, the emphasis of the relationship. You can see how powerful these relationships were becoming. How effective was his strategy? Never before had so few accomplished so much! Never before had so few had such a major impact on the world! Or since! The Big Idea today is this: **The most powerful force in the world is a relationship. Men will do for love what they will do for no other reason.** Jesus loved these men! He was willing to go to a cross for these men! He was willing to sacrifice his life for these men! These men were willing to sacrifice their lives for this person they had

come to love, Jesus! In fact we know from tradition and the Bible that at least eleven of them did give their lives!

I've mentioned this before, at the top of my daily to do list, I have a little sentence. I would rather die for a worthy cause than live for no reason. So what is the cause? The cause is not a task, the cause is a person! The cause is a relationship with a person, because that's what salvation is. It's not a task, it's a relationship. So the mission is a relationship.

The Power of Relationships

Let's talk a little bit about the power of relationships. When Americans have a problem we ask what do we need to do to fix this problem? The Chinese have a different method. When they have a problem, they ask what are the relationships that we need to put into place to solve this problem? Do you see the dramatic difference between these two approaches? We view problems as a task to be accomplished, but the Chinese view problems as something is wrong in our relationships. We don't have the right relationships in place to solve this problem. That's exactly what Jesus did! When Jesus saw the problem that the world was perishing in its own sins, he said I'm going to go build some relationships. That's how I'm going to solve this problem. Men, whatever problem you face, the power for solving that problem is not your ability, your skill set, your excellence, although those things will be available. What's the verse? Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborer builds in vain? But the brick layer better know how to lay bricks, too! So your talents are important, but it's about the relationships we need to put into place in order to solve this problem and bring salvation to the world. So whatever problem you're facing, it's worth asking what are the relationships that I need to put into place. My family's not working, what are the relationships I need to bring around my family in order to solve this problem. I'm struggling with this addiction, I'm addicted to pornography. I've told the other guys a little bit about it, but they have no idea what's going on here really. What are the relationships that need to be put in place to have victory over this instead of just managing your sin? What a lot of us do is we bring other people into our problems just enough to give us enough strength to manage our sins. But we never really get to the truth of it! What are the relationships you need in place to get victory over that sin? That's what Jesus came for! To build relationships, the ones that would bring true salvation.

John Doerr from Kleiner Perkins, how many of you know of him? Many regard John as the greatest venture capitalist who has ever lived. He's the man behind such startups as Sun Microsystems, Compaq, Intuit, Amazon, AOL, and Google. He's the venture capitalist who got behind those enterprises and made them work. He was asked in an interview what he looks for when he's deciding where to make his bets. You know what he said? Teams. He said I bet on teams. Some people would say people, I say teams. It's not just people, but how these people work together in relationships. Because the one thing you know for sure when you go into a new venture capital deal is that you're going to have problems! So you have to ask yourself are these the people that you want to face those problems with? John Doerr understood this principle of building relationships, of putting the emphasis on them. The greatest financial economic gambler of all time (probably) says it's about relationships! He bets on teams. That's what Jesus was doing. That's how powerful relationships are! Bringing the right people around you! We say it here often that if you want to change your life, and I would say that I don't know anybody who ever really has changed their life, apart from the regular study of God's word and being in a small group, a band of brothers, with some other men doing life on life together. In a group small enough so that you are honest, that you feel like you could trust them enough. If the group gets too big, you can feel a little vulnerable, that there's too much at risk, so you just give enough to have the group help you manage your sins. But having a group small enough, getting to know them well enough, and trusting them

enough so that you can share what's really going on in your life is what lets you have victory over your struggles! Or just get the answers to the real questions that are on your mind, the questions you might be afraid to ask a bigger group because you know they would misinterpret where you were coming from. You don't want that, you don't need that. So a group of men you can do life on life with, that you really get to know and really let get to know you, that's where the power is in the Christian life. It's in the word, and it's in doing life together with a few other people, honestly! Much more could be said about this, but most meaningful change takes place in the context of these life on life relationships. That's because the most powerful force in the world is a relationship. And it's here you find that men will do for love what they will do for no other reason.

Building Healthy Relationships

Finally, let's talk about a few ideas for building healthy relationships. First, we probably should define a healthy relationship. A healthy relationship has to begin with the truth. You can't have a healthy relationship if you're building it around a lie. Integrity and truth. Trust is also important, it's the commodity on which the whole world runs. I trust that this person in this lane is not going to pull over into my lane. Happened twice on the same trip that somebody did pull over and I had to slam my breaks, but we live by trust! It's an extremely important part of a healthy relationship. But then there are things that you don't want to have in a healthy relationship that help define it, too. If you have a relationship with somebody, and they're always trying to control, manipulate, or otherwise use you. You know that whatever they're talking about they already know where they want you to end up. If any of you guys are married, you know what I'm talking about. Did I say that? Just kidding... Not really. Anyway, if you are in a relationship with some other people and you feel like there's something that you have to do to win acceptance in that group, which is not a healthy relationship. That doesn't mean that you want people to enable you in some sort of behavior, but just in a normal relationship you have to talk a certain way, dress a certain way, go to certain meetings. You have to perform in order to be my friend. That's not healthy. So to find a group like that, that's what it means to be in a healthy relationship.

There is a process of relationships. When I first saw my wife, now of 41 years, Patsy, for the first time, I walked up to her, and said hi Patsy, my name is Pat. I love you, would you like to get married? No, of course not! There is a process of relationships and if you violate that process, you're going to turn people off. We have a process here of assimilating men into this Bible Study, to try to help them feel more comfortable. When they come the first two weeks, we just take them aside and orient them a little to what's going on before we assimilate them into a table. You all have this great skill of embracing these new guys, and then loving them until they feel that they can trust you, and then they open up from there. But there is a process of relationships and it's important not to violate this process. It's so insulting, and I've done it! I remember a first time visitor here and he indicated that he wasn't a Christian and I asked him if he wanted to become one. He basically said no, he wanted to take a little longer with things. I badgered him into praying the prayer. You know why he prayed the sinners' prayer? Because he was willing to do whatever it took to get out of my sight. That's a long time ago, and I still bear the scars of that. I violated him, and that's not what Christians do!

There are limits to relationships. You can't have close relationships with more than a small handful of people. A SMALL handful of people! You are finite! Even Jesus restricted himself to a dozen key relationships, and even among them, he had three who were even closer than the rest of the twelve, Peter, James, and John. You're finite, you just can't have relationships with anybody at any kind of depth, Facebook notwithstanding! I've got over 3,000 Facebook friends! Most of those people you've never even met, but there's a different purpose for doing that. Another thing for another time.

Knowing where to build, another key aspect in healthy relationships. The principle relationship is the one we build with God, that's relationship number one! If you feel like you don't have that intimacy, that connection, that openness, that two way exchange going on with God; Jesus says I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I call you my friends. If you don't actually feel like you are the friend of Jesus, you have some more distance on the goal line on this relationship with God. Second, is our family. Whether you're married and have kids or not. If you're married, your wife; there is no relationship in all of creation that closely resembles the one of a man and a woman sharing sink! If you're not getting that one right, doing our part to have that be a right relationship; and that might be sacrificial love for some of you. For all of us right? The tendency in our marriages and really all of our relationships is I remember all the bad things you did to me and all the good things I did to you. That's human nature! The way to have a successful marriage is not to build a 50/50 marriage. The way to have a great marriage is to have 90/10 give/take marriage. And brother, let me tell you, if you think you're giving 90% and only getting 10% in return, then you're probably about 50/50. You're just thinking I'm so sacrificial! I do so much for her and she only does just this. Mmm not so much!

With your children, another talk for another time. Your family, extended family, your parents, your siblings, also another time. Work relationships. For most men, the closest relationships they have are the people that they work with. If those go beyond the task and get towards real meaning and purpose in life, that's okay! The mission is building relationships. We're not even talking about relationships in terms of ministering to others, we're just talking about becoming disciples here, not even making disciples yet. The reason we talk about this principle of building relationships is because that is the mission. Jesus understood it. The Big Idea: **The most powerful force in the world is a relationship. Men will do for love what they will do for no other reason.** Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our dearest Father, Holy Spirit, thank you so much for this principle of building relationships. That our salvation is a relationship, that you existed eternally in this love relationship. Lord, I pray that those of us who have gotten one or two degrees or more off track on what this Christian faith is all about will hear what they need to hear today and understand that this is a relationship, salvation is a relationship. The mission that you undertook when you came to earth was to build relationships so that people could enter into this salvation. And that we would build these relationships, because you have said that all men will know that we are your disciples if we do this, if we love one another, if we build relationships. That's how people know we're Christians! So we ask that you would give us the individual direction that we need today to live out this principle of building relationships. We pray this in Jesus name, amen!