

# My Most Important Relationships Are Not Working

*Matthew 22:37-39, John 13:34, John 15:9-12, Galatians 5:14, Romans 13:9-10*

Good morning, men! So we are doing this series Man Alive and what we are doing is looking at seven primal needs that men have. These are the seven primal needs that firstly I've observed, and after meeting with thousands of men over 40 years, they've invariably mentioned one of these seven symptoms.

I've been repeating these seven symptoms every week so the process of picking them up and learning them and remembering them might be increased. It's repetition – learning theory stuff.

- First, I just feel like I am in the middle of this thing alone.
- Secondly, I don't feel like God cares about me personally.
- I don't feel like my life has purpose. It feels like things are random.
- I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.
- My soul feels dry.
- Many of the most important relationships – they are not helping; they aren't working.
- And finally, number seven. I just don't feel like I am doing anything that is making a difference and that is leaving the world a better place.

When we did the lesson on purpose, we talked about how, biblically speaking, when Jesus called the disciples—he called Peter, James and John—He called them to be disciples. And when Jesus left the earth, his last words were, “Go and make disciples.” To be a disciple is the highest honor to which a man can aspire. The purpose of our lives is to become a disciple. It's a little overworked and misunderstood perhaps, but it is a rich, yeasty concept and it is the purpose of our lives.

Then negatively, we need to figure out what are the destructive behaviors; what is holding us back from becoming a disciple; and positively, what are the things we can do to live out what it really means to be a disciple.

One need was to experience transcendence, awe and communion – the relationship with God. The first commandment—the most important thing—is to love God with the totality of our being. We talked about the feeling if that is not working, our soul feels dry, and how we can attend to that.

The second thing we want to look at positively is the second most important thing we can do, and that's to love other people. So the title of this message is: “My Most Important Relationships Are Not Working.”

## THE PRIMAL NEED

First of all, let's talk about the primal need. The primal need. So let's face it. Relationships are messy, right?

My daughter was getting married in November, and she's four years older than our son, and our son got married in June. The younger married before the older. Our future son-in-law asked our son, since he's getting ready to marry his sister, and since he's already been married for a few months – he said, "John, can you give me any advice?" John said, "Yeah. Girls are weird."

You know – if it wasn't for relationships being messy, and if it wasn't for relationships, the Bible could be a lot shorter – maybe about 80% shorter! But the Bible gives us God's will for every kind of relationship. Whether that's parents and children, spouses, relatives, bosses, coworkers and even enemies, the Bible maps out God's will for relationships and how we work those out.

Despite what the headlines read—"Girls are weird and men are bad;" that's what the headlines are and men don't do relationships well—despite what the headlines say, men are made for relationships. In fact, I would like to suggest to you that relationships trump everything else. To prove that, all you have to do is talk to any young man who's in prison who happens to also be a father, or talk to any young soldier serving overseas, and you'll find out what is really important, and that thing is relationships.

Every guy I've ever talked to has wanted to have healthy, loving and strong relationships. Whether its teenagers... When I wrote the book *Young Man in the Mirror*, I got 15 young high school students together. The focus of their interests was relationships – all kinds of relationships – from grandfathers to fathers to sons to brothers to bachelors. Every man I've ever talked to wants to have strong and healthy relationships.

Also, as men, most of us are wired to want to have that one special relationship where we have a soul mate. Here's how I would describe this primal need that we each have: a deep and powerful need to nurture and to be nurtured, to love and be loved, without reservation. To feel like there is one person in the world who really cares about us personally, just the way we are, and that we have somebody that we can take care of. Even if we don't marry, this is still a very strong primal need that just gets met in different ways.

Yet most men feel like they're handicapped when it comes to relationships. Why is it that men feel so handicapped? Sometimes it is because we just didn't pay attention to relationships as they were coming up. Men say all the time that when their marriages are not working, they just don't know how to do relationships. And it's because they didn't pay attention to relationships as they were coming up or perhaps their parents were not trained themselves so they had no mentorship or tutelage on how to do relationships. [Relationships] take time, so a lot of the time guys get busy with building their career and other things and we don't invest time into relationships. A lot of times, we don't know how to handle conflict so we don't know how to *resolve* conflict in relationships. Resolving conflict is so foundational to having healthy relationships, but instead we withdraw when we have conflict and so we don't do relationship well – and *lots* of other reasons.

Basically, men tell me all the time they keep repeating the same things—the same questions—over and over again. “How do I make her happy?” Good luck with that. When our daughter was about 12, she had a fight with another child in the neighborhood. When you’re in the office and they bring you a problem, you say, “Give me the facts,” and you say, “I understand. Just do this, that and the other, and everything will be all right.” Then you come home. Jen was having this boo-hoo experience and I said, “Well, Jen, let’s sit down and talk about it.” She said, “Oh, Dad, it’s so terrible.” I asked her to give me the facts. She did, and about halfway through I said, “I think I have it. Just do this, that and the other, and everything will be all right.” Then she really started crying! She said, “Oh, Dad, from now on when I’m crying, would you please not say anything that’s logical?!”

## **HOW TO REALLY LOVE A WOMAN**

“How do I make her happy?” “How do I raise godly kids?” The third question I hear over and over again: “How can I have friendships that go deeper than just trading jokes?” What I see is that men’s hearts for the most part really are in the right place, but they are just frustrated at the practical level about how to do these relationships.

How are you feeling in your relationship IQ? There is good news – not just that we are made for relationships and love but our mistakes are not fatal. Love is a skill that can be learned and improved upon, and so what I want us to do now is take a look into the Word of God and see what it has to say about some of these relationship things. Hopefully, this will be review and bringing it back to the front lobe of your brain. For some of you, it may be some new things. And then I want to fairly transition and spend some time giving you some very practical love-in-action ideas that you can try to apply.

You should be turned to Matthew 22:37-39. After Jesus said the most important thing is loving God—I want you to see this with your own eyes—Verse 39: “And the second commandment is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.” The most important thing that’s happening in the Word is that God is bringing you into right relationship. He wants you to be in right relationship with Him. That’s the vertical. The second most important thing in Scripture that God wants for you is horizontal. He wants you to be in right relationship with other people. Being in right relationship with other people proves that you are a disciple, which is the purpose.

Turn with me now to John 13:34. These are the words of Jesus. He’s talking about giving a new command. He says, “A new command I give you that you love one another.” What’s new about that? What is new is the next sentence. “As I have loved you, so you must also love one another.” How is it that he’s loved us? Watch this. “As the Father has loved me so have I loved you.” Just think about the Trinity and think about...we can’t really imagine it but we can try to imagine the infinite, eternal, powerful love that exists in the godhead between the Father, Son and Spirit. The maximum amount of love that’s available in all of creation—the infinite, the maximum amount of love that is available—is the amount of love that the Father has for His own Son. Jesus tells us in John 15:9 [paraphrased], “In the same way that the Father has loved me with this infinite, eternal love, this is how I love you.” It’s hard to take in, isn’t it?

He goes on. He says, “You must love one another as I have loved you.” So think about the way the Father loves Jesus, and that Jesus loves me that same way and I’m commanded to love other people that same way. I’m to have the love that’s within the godhead – the Trinity. I’m to bring that and be a vessel to other people of that same kind of love. Wow!

Look at the next verse: “All men will know that you are my disciples if you do this.” This is an evidence of our discipleship. Will we do this perfectly? Of course not. So it’s the vector; it’s the direction that we are moving in that’s the most important part of this.

So here’s the Big Idea for the day: **If you cut the Bible and it bleeds neighbor-love, the essence of Scripture is love.** Cut the Bible anywhere; it just bleeds this neighbor- love stuff. Like I said, if it wasn’t for relationships you could get rid of 80% of the Bible. It is there on every page. It is the essence of Scripture. I’m going to prove that with two more verses and then I’ll move into the practical. Turn to Galatians, Chapter 5.

If you are Baptist this is not a problem. They don’t have air conditioning in Baptist churches because the fanning of the pages turning is adequate. Galatians 5:14 says, “The entire law is summed up in a single command;”—in other words, the essence of Scripture is found in this one command—“Love your neighbor as yourself.” Neighbor-love is what it is all about. You know, it just occurred to me that there may be someone listening that really didn’t know this – like this is the acid test of your faith; horizontally speaking, this is it. This is the essence of Scripture. We are cutting the Bible a little and it is bleeding neighbor- love.

Turn to Romans 13:9. Basically, of all the forces in the world that can be resisted, the most difficult to resist is love. God knew this; this is why he set this up as his commandment. It’s the most powerful force in the world. Romans 13:9: “The commandments (These are all the horizontal commandments of God’s moral law. The vertical commandments [are] don’t make idols, etc. These are the horizontal commandments), ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandments, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” The Living Bible says if you keep this one command, you will find that you are keeping all the others. If you keep this one command, you will find that you are keeping all the others. **Cut the Bible and it bleeds neighbor-love. The essence of Scripture is love.**

In the book *Man Alive*, I talk about how to love a woman and how to love a child. How to really love a woman is the next little piece here I want to mention briefly, and when I say briefly, I mean very briefly, because if I tell you everything that is in the book you won’t buy it. Seriously, we don’t have time to talk about everything in *Man Alive* the book.

There are ten very practical deposits that you can make into your wife’s emotional bank account. I’ve talked to you about this in the past. I will say that to really love a woman, this is key. In the work that we do—we’ve done this for 25 years, we’ve worked with thousands of churches, impacted 10 million men—if we take men’s marriage problems and put them here in one stack, and we take all of the other problems that men struggle with and put them here in the other stack, men’s marriage problems alone

are bigger than all the other men's problems combined. You take everything else men are struggling with and it doesn't come close to the marriage issue. By far and away, the number one issue in our world and culture today is that men's marriages are difficult and not working the way they're supposed to. The bombardment from culture... We're not here to talk about culture, but the impact of the world on Christian marriages has been very profound. That's all for how to really love a woman. Got it?

## HOW TO REALLY LOVE A CHILD

How to really love a child. I have the ten most practical love-in-action ideas that I've picked up over the years in the chapter itself. Let me give you as many as we have time for in the remaining time. Every parent wants their child to grow up and love Christ and continue to walk with the Lord.

Looking back, I want to tell you the single best idea that we ever had, Patsy and I stumbled on by accident. Some of you have heard this before. We decided that the most important thing for our children's spiritual growth would be for them to read the Bible for themselves on a regular basis – to have a time of regular daily devotions. We decided to pay our kids to read the Bible. What we did was we called a family meeting and said, "If you would read the Bible for 25 days in any given month, we'll give you the money to buy a CD." I thought I detected a yawn. Then I said, "But that's not all. If you will read 25 days out of a month for 10 out of 12 months, we will also—in addition to the CDs—will give you \$250 in cash." All of a sudden, it was like they were Chihuahuas on caffeine. Then I said, "But that's not all. If you will do 25 days a month for all 12 out of 12 months, we'll double it with an additional \$250." Now their eyes were really getting big. They said, "How do we do this? What do we have to do?" "It's really simple. It's the honor system. If you want, you could make a calendar, tape it on your mirror, put a check box next to the days you do it; if you miss a day, you can have a make-up day." We had a grace-based home, not a legalistic home. Be careful if you do this; don't make it legalistic and performance-based. We told them if they wanted to do a devotional, like *Youthwalk*, that is fine, too. We were looking for maybe five minutes a day – that's it.

They did this. Is it bribery? What do you think? Yeah, sure it is. Here is what I do know. All during high school, our kids did devotions. They went to a Christian high school. Ours did devotions. None of their friends did. They still do and they both love Jesus today. You know, for all the people who object to this—I've had people angry at me because it was bribery—you know, get a life.

There's one very practical idea. Secondly, you could lead your kids in a family devotion. By the way, some of you have grandkids so this might be something your grandkids could do. So during the school year, three or four days a week, not a legalistic thing (we couldn't do Fridays because I was here), I would lead a 15-minute devotion.

We put the clock out where everybody could see it because they were always concerned I would run over and make them late – because I did that for a long time. We bought a little clock so everyone could see how much time was left. It was simple; it was very inductive. We would look at what was going on in the newspaper, family, neighborhood or school, and I would apply a verse to that and we would pray.

At first the prayers were, “God please bless me, let me have a good day.” So we decided to add the component of praying for another person each day that was in need – a schoolmate, teacher, someone in the neighborhood, or someone they read about who needed prayer. This made the prayer more meaningful. We dropped the whole concept in the summer because of sleep schedules and then we picked it up again in the fall. It was very rewarding one day when my wife was talking to one of the teachers. The teacher said, “Wow. I sure would like to be in those family devotions you all have.” My wife asked why. The teacher said, “Your daughter is always saying, in her family devotions they talked about this, and we learned that, and we prayed for these people, and she’s all excited.” I’m thinking, *Wow*, because when we’re doing it, their eyes are half shut and they don’t seem that interested. But you’re building something into their lives that is very powerful. We paid them to read the Bible and we lead family devotions.

We have time for one more. I’ll talk about establishing work boundaries. My experience is that I’ve tended to compartmentalize my family when I’m at work, but not compartmentalize my work when I am at home. Since I’m very sensitive—my parents were not very involved in my life, so I was very sensitive to this—I decided I would work a certain amount of hours and that was it. I decided I would not work past 6 p.m., I would not take work home, and I would not work weekends. Those are my boundaries. Do I violate them? Nope. I didn’t. So when I got home, I was home. I was with my kids. There was always a tendency not to be, but I made it my policy to be with my kids.

Here’s just a simple piece of advice. It’s a mindset. Write your work appointments in pencil and your family commitments in pen. Keep your word; be with your kids. Give time to whom it is due. Time is love and love is time. That’s as simple as it gets.

Someone in your family, someone you love, desperately needs to know they are loved without reservation. It’s very possible that you, right now, are someone who desperately needs to know that you are loved without reservation. That’s because of this big idea: **Cut the Bible and it bleeds neighbor-love. The essence of Scripture is love.** Jesus proved it by his actions. Nothing is more powerful than a man who will love.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for Your Word. We don’t need to come up with clever speech or persuasion but simply to present Your Word and invite Your Holy Spirit to superintend it to our hearts. Lord, we do see that the Bible is dripping in neighbor-love and that it really does sum up the Scripture. Lord, for those of us who are not as good as we want to be in relationships, I pray that you would do some little thing here today that would lead us, inspire us, or even challenge us to take a step in the right direction. For Your glory and praise, and in Your name, Jesus. Amen.