

Broken Cisterns: Finding Significance in Relationships with People - Week 3

I guess another way of titling this week would be getting my sense of significance from what other people think about me.

My Target: Reflect on how God can be worshiped through the relationships in my life rather than me worshiping the relationships themselves.

The Good Purpose of God-given Relationships:

What type of relational connections exist between us and others?

Parent, Spouse, Child, Family Member, Friend, Brothers and Sister in Christ, Co-worker, Acquaintance, Neighbor, Stranger, Enemy...

Each relationship has a context. Expectations, benefits, liabilities. But in each of them we are in some form managing the impressions of the people we are in relationship with. Do they feel loved? Are they happy? What are they thinking about what we just said, did, etc.

Let's start by looking at some scriptures that help us understand God's intent for some of these relationships... Asking each time, what does God seem to intend for us in saying this?

Genesis 2:18

[18] Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (ESV)

Proverbs 27:17

[17] Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 12:18-19

[18] But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

[19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? (ESV)

1 Timothy 5:4 (In regard to the church supporting widows)

[4] But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. (ESV)

Ephesians 6:1-4

[1] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." [4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (ESV)

1 John 3:11

[11] For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (ESV)

Romans 15:1-2

[1] We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. [2] Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (ESV)

How would you summarize God's good purpose for human relationship?

Praise God for the blessing of human relationship.

How do these relationships (roles) give us a sense of significance?

Loved. Needed. Appreciated.

I have purpose. I have value.

Who am I? Identity questions.

I believe that a healthy biblical perspective regarding these sources of significance are critical to investing our expectations rightly.

Does it Matter What "They" Think?

We obviously do care what other people think. Otherwise peer pressure wouldn't exist. Commercials wouldn't use it as a sales tactic. Our feelings wouldn't get hurt. We wouldn't be tempted to compromise.

But each of us has a gradient of care. All the people in our lives as described in our list earlier fit on it. From random people who we have nothing significant in common with to our immediate family and perhaps God himself should be added to this list.

Less Important			Most Important
God	Family	Random Peers	Friends
Or maybe...			

We really should care what people think because...

Proverbs 22:1

[1] A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold. (ESV)

1 Timothy 3:7 (Instructions for Elders)

[7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (ESV)

Romans 12:18

[18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (ESV)

We really shouldn't care what people think because...

Proverbs 29:25

[25] The fear of man lays a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe. (ESV)

Isaiah 2:22

[22] Stop regarding man
in whose nostrils is breath,
for of what account is he? (ESV)

Colossians 3:22–24 (Household roles, servants)

[22] Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (ESV)

Romans 12:2

[2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

Galatians 1:10 (Paul admonishing those who have embraced another gospel)

[10] For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (ESV)

Maybe we should care in some ways but not in all ways because...

1 Thessalonians 2

Ask God to fill us with discernment in thinking rightly about where our significance comes from and healthy thoughts regarding our investment in others perceptions of us.

Why do so many of us get an endorphin kick when people laugh at our jokes or like our social media posts or clap for our performances? It is a slippery slope.

Sometimes we make good things into ultimate things. I believe this is the heart of Christian idolatry. One place Christians seem to be supportive of idolatry is within the family. I've heard on many occasions some reference to the family being our most important priority in life. We can certainly be sinfully neglectful of fulfilling our role within the family structure in ways highlighted in the above texts. The scripture also speaks of the family coming not first but after our spiritual priorities of faithfulness and worship of God.

Or what about church ministry? After all, isn't that spiritual? Unless it isn't. Unless for you it has become not a means of worship but a means of significance. These things remind me of respectable sins. They are wrong but we seem hesitant to call one another out lest they remind us of our own plank.

Of course we can add in here significance from what our bosses or coworkers think of us. Anytime we receive value from our reputation in the eyes of someone besides God.

It is so easy to slip from healthy thinking to unhealthy thinking. We must keep a careful eye on our hearts, on our sense of significance and if we are letting good things become ultimate things.

What makes us biblically significant?

Genesis 1:26-27 (Made in God's likeness)

[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

[27] So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (ESV)

Matthew 6:26 (No need to worry as God cares for all his creation, most especially mankind. Also Matt 12:12 heal on Sabbath sheep vs man)

[26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (ESV)

1 Peter 1:18-19 (Bought with the precious blood of Christ)

[18] knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (ESV)

1 John 3:1 (Not to mention all the verse about our adoption Gal 4:5, Eph 1:5, Rom 8:15)

[1] See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (ESV)

I believe the testimony of scripture is that we have imputed value. Imputed means assigned value. For instance I have money, which is made of the same paper and ink with different numbers on it. Where it to have no numbers at all it would have no real value, but when assigned or imputed with numbers they become valuable to me and those I trade them for goods or services.

We are apart from God according to scripture are: dead... faithless... vapors... but God has declared us according to scripture to be... loved... chosen... redeemed... adopted...

reflections of himself. Our value is not innate but it is certainly real. Our value comes from what God has declared to be true about us.

We cannot fall into the trap of exchanging what God has told us makes us valuable for what the world tells us makes us valuable, and yet we do. When we do we are investing our sense of significance in a broken cistern that won't last. You'll get fired from your job, the love of your life will die, your family will reject you, your friends will cancel you. And then where will you be? That statement within the Keller video where he talks about his wife standing over his coffin and not wanting her god to be dead lying in a box is especially powerful now that he is.

How Can We Live With Healthy Perspectives in Our Relationships?

What does it look like to be unhealthy?

Deuteronomy 13:6-11

[6] "If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which neither you nor your fathers have known, [7] some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, [8] you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. [9] But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. [10] You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [11] And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you. (ESV)

What can we do to fight for health in our relationships?

Next Week and Beyond:

Broken Cisterns: Finding Peace in Circumstances and Control