



ENGAGE

Notes and questions from the talks for further engagement by individuals or groups.

allsaintsworcester

TOGETHERNESS (1): friendship

Recap

In this talk Rich taught into the importance of investing in deep, strong and lifelong friendships and the need to make sure we are wise, intentional and prayerful in how we prioritise our relationships. He encouraged us to take time to reassess our relationships and to check that we're not unintentionally neglecting our key friendships and spreading ourselves too thin.

Rich reminded us that not everyone we know can be or is a *friend*. We live in a hyper-networked world where we know more people than ever, all compounded by social media. This means we can feel like we know lots of people, but not truly known by many or any people.

Followers of Jesus are called to pattern their life after Christ in this area. Jesus is clear in John 15:15 that we are his friends. We are called to love people as Jesus loves.

There are two Greek words for *love* that the New Testament writers use. One is *agape* – which refers to God's perfect, unconditional love for all people. The other is *phileo* – which refers to a deep affection we can have for someone else (true friendship).

When reading the scriptures, it's good to ask which of these words is being used by the writer, to help better understand what kind of love is being envisioned.

Read and ask

There are lots of examples in the scriptures of friendship that speak to both *agape* and *phileo* love.

Take a look at one or more of the following stories and look for the *intentionality*, *commitment* and *cost* of these friendships:

- Jonathan & David
- Ruth & Naomi
- Paul & Timothy

They are not perfect friendships without issues and moments of conflict. How do they handle these? What can we learn from them?

And/or, revisit the story of Jesus and Peter and their friendship that Rich looked at in his talk. Reflect further on how Jesus extends grace to Peter and how Jesus trusts that grace bears fruit in time.

Discuss

How does our culture and society's approach to relationships make deep, committed, Kingdom-oriented more difficult to have and develop?

How does social media make it harder? And where can it help?

Which friendships do you need to make a higher priority? Which relationships do you need to give less time and attention to?

Rich talked about three things we can all do to lean into this aspect of our lives:

1. *Be wise* – prayerfully discerning which friendships to invest in?
2. *Be aware* – what unrealistic expectations do I have of others? Where do I let people down?
3. *Be intentional* – what practical ways of investing in people do I need to get better at doing?

Practice

Take some time to reflect on your friendships and relationships and ask God to help you prayerfully review them in light of these notes and the talk. You might find the exercise on the next page a helpful way of doing this.

EXERCISE: RELATIONSHIPS AUDIT

A word before you begin. This is not easy and requires you need to be as objective as possible. Some people find this harder than others. Remember that you're not saying someone is *not* important by saying someone else is *more* important. This is about getting a sense of priority when it comes to which relationships you invest in at what level. Be careful who you show this to.

1. List all the relationships that you have with people you spend time with (beyond work*) on a regular basis – i.e. every so often, frequently or whenever possible. Include family, friends, people you lead or serve alongside in our church family, neighbours and acquaintances. Include God.
2. Go through that list and allocate each entry a score of 1-4.
1 = most important, 4 = least important.

1 = immediate family and closest friends (the ones you're "doing life" with over the long haul – some may well not be in Worcester)
2 = *some* wider family perhaps, your good friends and other key relationships in and out of church
3 = *other* wider family and *some* in our church community, plus neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances etc
4 = everyone else!
3. Write each entry on your list into the circles on next page (use initials if easier). Those you scored "1" go in the inner circle (hint: God likes to go in first), any "2"s go in middle circle and "3"s go in outer circle. Anyone marked with a 4 goes beyond the circle.
4. Get a coloured marker or felt tip pen and draw a circle around the inner and middle circle.

The relationships inside this coloured circle are the ones you are saying are the most important and need to take priority in your lives.

Those in the outer circle should take lowest priority.
Those outside the circles may not be a priority at all!
5. Reflect on your diary for the past 6-12 months. Does it reflect the completed circles?

TOGETHERNESS (2): Forgiveness

Recap

If last week's topic was about how we can go about creating positive, healthy connections with others in community, this week we're looking at **how we deal with the pain of being hurt when it all goes wrong.**

Andy first acknowledged the pain and complexity involved in forgiveness along with the need to allow space for anger, lament and comfort, especially in cases where the offence(s) is/are severe, prolonged or institutional. For this reason, whilst forgiveness is still a non-negotiable in following Jesus, it's better to think of it as a 'direction of travel' than a standard we've either missed or hit.

In a piece written by Dr John Coutts (Andy's former ethics tutor) he gives the biggest possible vision for why forgiveness is so important for Christians...

'To forgive one another is to share a gift God has given to both the forgiver and the forgiven alike, and to do so in the context of the larger story of God's reconciliation of the whole cosmos to God's self in Christ'

Often when people make an argument for forgiveness it's based on the personal, cathartic benefit. In other words, 'If you forgive, you'll feel better, less anxious etc.' and whilst this is true it also misses the bigger picture; that forgiveness is about 'Joining with God in the Renewal of All Things'.

The first two chapters of Genesis depict a world where people live in harmony with each other and with God which is tragically fractured by human sin in chapter three. The rest of scripture is the story of God restoring what was broken with the climax being Jesus' death and resurrection. Through this work, Jesus paid an unpayable debt and offered the free gift of forgiveness to people who didn't deserve it (that's us by the way...).

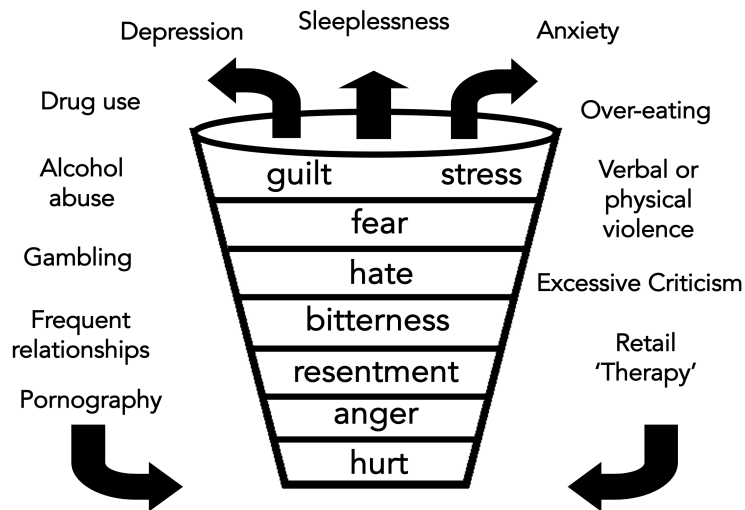
The scriptures tell us that this free gift of mercy and grace was never meant to stop with us but must be 'paid forward' to others as a sign of the Kingdom. As costly and painful as this can be, we must practice and persevere...to not do this is to pattern ourselves after the world.

Read and ask

Read Matthew 18:21-35...

- What do you think Peter's motive was in asking the question in verse 21?
- What was Jesus attempting to communicate in verse 22?
- In the parable, the two servants owe different amounts. What point do you think the author was trying to communicate here?
- What do you think causes the first servant to be unmerciful despite having received mercy himself?
- Verses 32-35 are some of the most severe words of Jesus recorded in the whole of scripture. Why is Jesus so hard on the first servant? Could this ultimately be a loving act? How?

Discuss



The picture above shows how our emotional 'cup' can fill up and overflow when we get hurt by people.

- Have you experienced the chain reaction of hurt leading to anger then resentment, bitterness, hate, fear, guilt and stress?
- Can you relate to any of the coping mechanisms/negative attitudes and behaviours that can come from being hurt? (share as much as you are comfortable with in the group)
- Andy's daughter Verity likened hurt to a virus (this carries extra meaning now!) which is spread from one person to the next and keeps going until someone intentionally resists passing it on (forgives). Have you ever observed a toxic environment where hurt has spread in this way?
- How intentional are you about forgiving people? Is it something that's active or is it more of a 'riding it out over time'?

EXERCISE: Steps to Forgiveness

Spend some time alone working through the following steps to forgiveness...if you get to a particular point and get stuck, come back to it after a few days and go through the stages again. In time you'll find you progress further and eventually you'll be able to remember without pain and the feelings of hatred will fade.

1). Contemplate your own need for forgiveness

Spend a few moments in quiet and remember your own need for God's loving mercy. You may want to recall a time you've fallen short yourself and received forgiveness from God.

Prayer:

'Lord thank you for the gift of forgiveness which I do not deserve and yet you offer it freely. Amen.'

2). Remind ourselves that whoever hurt us will have been hurt too

This step is about identifying with the other. It is NOT about excusing what was said or done but a simple acknowledgement that most hurtful behaviour comes from somewhere.

Prayer:

'Lord, I acknowledge that I was hurt by somebody who, just like me is broken and most likely has been hurt by others. Help me to see them as you see them. Amen.'

3). Ask Jesus to forgive them

Often, we find we're not strong enough to forgive people ourselves, but a step in the direction of forgiveness is to ask *Jesus* to forgive them as he is able to forgive 'every sin and blasphemy' (Matthew 12:31). Use the following prayer or one like it *including the person's name and specifically what they did* and how it hurt you. Where possible speak the words out loud.

Prayer:

'Lord, I am weak but you are strong.

Please forgivefor

It made me feel

Amen.

4). Pray to forgive them yourself

This is where it can get really hard. If you find you are unable to do this, go back through the first three stages. Bear in mind forgiveness is an act of the will so you will never feel like forgiving something really bad. It is offering a gift they DON'T deserve. Take the same approach as with step three saying the person's name, what they did and how it made you feel recalling how you felt when it happened.

Prayer:

'Lord, I forgive.....for.....'

It made me feel.....'

Amen.

5). Pray blessing over them

This is the final stage in forgiving someone. If you can do this, you really have got to a place where you have released them.

Prayer:

'Lord, I release..... from my debt.

I ask for your blessing upon them.

Please work for good in their life. Amen.'