

St Martins C3 – April 14, 2024

Safe Relationships – Iron Sharpens Iron

Sermon Notes:

This year as a church we are going on a journey of discipleship. Part of that journey is the encouragement for each of us to invest in a close relationship with a focus on growing more like Jesus. That is why we are doing a series called: “Iron Sharpens Iron”.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

We need other people to help us in life and to grow in our walk with God. It seems to be a Biblical pattern for people to gather in groups of two or three for ministry or receiving from God.

Read Luke 9:1; 10:1; Matthew 18:19-20

Over the next few weeks, we are going to give you some principles for how you can have this type of conversation – both as a person helping others grow and as a person growing yourself.

Read 1 Peter 3:8

Peter shows the characteristics that define communities of faith. Agreement, sympathetic understanding, family-like love, compassion, and humility.

These were defining characteristics of the early church, and they can be hallmarks of our conversations as well.

Be of one mind

It is clear what these relationships can look like.

- Regular – connect four to six times over two months
- Mutual – helping each other
- Purposeful - involve encouragement and accountability

Be sympathetic and compassionate

We need to help others with their weaknesses by showing compassion. This looks like listening well, finding full understanding and encouragingly helping where we can.

Love each other as brothers and sisters

The more we invest in conversations with others around us, the more we can provide a warm family-like relationship for others. This means that we care deeply and respect their confidentiality.

Keep a Humble Attitude

For you to change you need to have a humble attitude and own that you are not perfect. You then need to be vulnerable with the person you are sharing and honestly tell them areas of weakness for you.

Humbly allow others to speak into your life.

As you commit to others may you find the power of doing things together. May you see that we are all better together.

Connect Group Material:

Key Point:

Building safe relationships creates an environment in which growth can happen.

Other Questions:

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What does this message tell you about God?

What does this message tell you about humans?

Tell us what you've learned from any relationships that have had agreement, understanding, warmth, compassion and humility.

What can you do to bring the principles of 1 Peter 3:8 to other major relationships in your life?

In your experience, how common are safe relationships in the church? Why do you think that is?

Have you found someone to have a "growth relationship" with yet?

Discuss how you can bring the following areas into that growth relationship: agreement, sympathy, compassion, warmth, confidentiality, trust, humility and vulnerability.

Monday Devotion: Growth Relationships

Read Colossians 2:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

“I’m on the journey,” can sometimes be used as an excuse for not making any progress in an area of life. If we are on a journey, then we don’t have to get to the destination.

However, “journey” is a good word to describe exactly what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. As we have accepted Jesus as Lord, we must continue to follow Him. We will make progress as we focus our lives on Him.

To mix our metaphors, this is a journey of growth. As we put Him at the centre of our lives, we grow strong in the faith.

We have called the kind of relationships that we are encouraging people into “growth relationships”. These are intentional connections we make with others to go further in our discipleship.

These relationships don’t have to be super-intense deliverance sessions, but they are intended to be times of encouragement to be more like the person God has called you to be.

As you consider the person you might meet up with, begin by thinking about the people who are already around you. There might be someone that you regularly spend time with that you could ask to be the person that you establish one of these relationships with.

Tuesday Devotion: Discipling Each Other

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1; Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1-5

It seems arrogant to tell others to be like us. We are nothing special, we are just following Jesus as best as we can. We know we are weak and can see our failures. If it was only about us in human terms, then we would encourage people not to be like us.

In 1 Corinthians 11, however, Paul doesn't just say, "Imitate me." He says, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." In other words, it is completely appropriate for us to see where Christ has done work in our lives and invite others to imitate those parts.

Do you have a good identity in Christ? Others should imitate that. Have you overcome a sin area in your life? Others should imitate that. Are you full of joy, have a good knowledge of Scripture or reaching out to the lost? If so, look for ways to invite others in to see how the good God has done in you can be copied.

We need each other. There will be some ways I am stronger and can help you, there are other ways you are stronger, and I will look to you for support.

We need to carry each other's burdens, and this includes finding the areas where we need extra help and asking the right people for that help.

As you build growth relationships may you look for things that God has done in you that allow you to help others.

Wednesday Devotion: Speak Words of Life

Read Ephesians 4:29

One of the key characteristics of living as children of light is that we will use the words we speak to build up the others around us. These words are to be good and helpful, so they will be an encouragement to the other people in our lives.

One of the key traits of good conversations is showing positive regard for other people. Without it, our attempts to be in a relationship with others won't be very successful.

Imagine sharing an area of growth with one person. Both seem to understand the issue, but one shows empathy and compassion, whereas the other speaks words of judgment. Which person are you most likely to open up to? Be the first kind of person.

Positive regard needs to be the foundation of our relationships. As we talk with others, we can make comments and ask questions rooted in genuine interest from a position of love and respect.

Once we have used our words to build positivity in our interactions, others will be more open to any words of feedback and accountability.

Today practise showing positive regard towards others and see the difference it makes.

Thursday Devotion: Bear with One Another

Read Colossians 3:12-14

The phrase, translated as “bear with” verse 13, also means “to hold up.” It brings a picture to our minds of lifting or carrying someone.

In a way, to love someone is to open ourselves to suffering. Their sadness becomes ours. This is one of the reasons we are so often guarded and slow to love. It can be hard to open ourselves to a relationship that may require from us what could be difficult or inconvenient.

Yet this is what God asks us to do as a community of Jesus’ followers. He calls us to love in a way that will cost us. God is not asking us to do anything that he has not first done himself. God did not guard his heart from us. He poured it out generously. Jesus bound up his heart with ours. He made our suffering his suffering. He made our pain his pain. And he asks us to do the same for others.

Significantly, this is not just talking about one person caring for another, but it indicates reciprocity, reinforcing the mutuality of a number of these relationships.

As you seek to build a safe environment for others in your relationships, look for ways you can carry their pain, as they will also carry yours.

Friday Devotion: Giving Grace

Read Ephesians 4:32

The command to be tender-hearted towards others and to practise the forgiveness that God has given to us helps us ensure that we have relationships filled with grace.

We know as Christians that God continues to love us and accept us despite the poor choices we continually make. We need to show that same grace towards the other people in our lives.

When you meet up with someone to talk about their growth you will encounter things that might make you raise your eyebrows. There might also be things that make you take a deep breath as you wonder how you are going to respond.

As Heather Holleman says:

“When I’m having trouble choosing to believe the best about someone because of their actions or attitudes that I may find morally reprehensible, I try to think of what this person was like as a child. I remember to discover the story behind why this person feels or acts as they do. Then I find myself overcome with compassion rather than condemnation.”¹

Because of what God has done for us our response always needs to be one of grace and understanding.

¹ Holleman, Heather. The Six Conversations (p. 30). Moody Publishers.