

# Relationships



Through making hard decisions in ministry we may unintentionally cause offense resulting in a breakdown in relationships. That has happened to me with some people, causing us both pain which is something I still grieve over today. However on the other hand I have been utterly blessed in meeting so many wonderful people I have ministered with who have become friends for life perhaps even after major differences of opinion!

Where there are good relationships, ministry mostly thrives, whereas a breakdown in trust will in time prove disastrous and bring discredit to Jesus in the community.

## Bible Perspective

Jesus' prayer in John 17 was that his followers become 'one'. However even Paul had a contentious quarrel with Barnabas causing them both to go their separate ways, Acts 15:39. Churches as a whole today also struggle with relationship issues, with discriminations between rich and poor (James 2:1-12), following different personalities (1 Cor 1:12), worldliness (1 Jn 2:15-17) and different moral standards (1 Cor 5), beliefs (2 Peter 2:1) and worldviews (Romans 14).

## Observations

1. Establishing good relationships is the basis of effective ministry. It is far more important than simply getting a job done. Give me someone who gets on well with people but may not be particularly gifted or someone who is very gifted but not very relational and I would go for the relational person every time.
2. To stand you need to understand. We are sometimes in danger of jumping to wrong conclusions too quickly so try and ascertain what is going on underneath the exterior.
3. When relationships are handled poorly it breeds cynical attitudes in people and many drop out of church never wanting to enter it again. That saddens the heart of God and us.
4. Ministry built on divisions don't normally last. Given time the same problems reoccur.
5. If you are experiencing burnout or close to it then you are more likely to experience fractured relationships. Pull back and be kind to yourself and others.
6. A researcher on a Ted talk on 'What makes for a good life' did a very comprehensive 75 years of study starting with over 700 boys and men. These people from various walks of life were interviewed every 2 years over 75 years. The answer to "What makes for a good life?" was that high quality relationships keep us happier and healthier and conflict is bad for our health. Of course the Bible itself gives us constant teaching of how to relate (Proverbs 15:1; 1 Cor 13:13).

## Cross cultural considerations

7. Understanding and maintaining healthy relationships in a cross-cultural environment can be very complex. For that reason, some established Mission agencies require significant training in cross-cultural issues before going to live

in another culture and further personal development in this area is given on the field. This can prevent untold damage in a cross-cultural environment. When good training is received there often is a major shift in one's thinking and operating style. We see the local people through different eyes and have a greater understanding how they think and work.

8. Working on good communication skills and language learning is important. During my first visit to Indonesia I once had a prophecy for one of the leaders in the church. He was a quiet man but the backbone to the work. So in my zeal I talked about steel reinforcement in a concrete column which can't be seen but provides strength. I mentioned he was like that in the ministry. A little later I noticed the atmosphere had changed and the wife approached me the next day and said, "Did you mean that my husband steals?" How embarrassing is that!
9. Our knowledge with others in observing cross-cultural relationships may be good but check that this knowledge is not simply a collective pool of ignorance as can be the case. We tend to think our values are right and where others differ, then they are wrong. My culture values a strong work ethic but many others place a higher value on gracious relationships which show honour to others, or generous hospitality and still other cultures, that family must always come first before one's job or comfort.
10. If you are serious about cross-cultural involvement then learn to understand that culture. There are many excellent study courses and books to increase our understanding.
11. When we enter a cross-cultural environment remember we are normally a guest in that culture. Sometimes we provoke others unintentionally to anger through our ignorance of the correct way to communicate respect and correction where needed.
12. When group relationships turn sour what is required is corporate repentance. That however requires a good dose of humility seldom seen, as we are so convinced we are right and the others are wrong. The truth is we are often both right and both wrong at the same time.
13. Probably some of the most enriching relationships I have are with brothers and sisters from a different cultural background to me who place Jesus as centre of their lives.

Ps 133:1 'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!'

### **Resources**

Difficult Conversations, by D Stone, B Patton and S Heen.

Finding the space to lead: A practical guide to mindful leadership, (ch 6&7) by J Marturano.

Cultural Anthropology: a Christian perspective, by Stephen A Grunlan and Marink Mayers.

When helping hurts, by B Fikkert and S Corbett.