

WEC 09 Bible Talk 2: Relationships: Permanent or Fleeting?

Good morning.

Do you talk to animals? I do. Yes, I'm a bit strange. And, no, I am not expecting them to answer me. Nor do I talk to them because there is no one else to talk to. I have lots of people to talk to. I have never been so alone that I had to start talking to a volleyball. Chuck's experience on the island seems a bit strange at first, but, can't you imagine being that lonely? Can't you imagine needing someone to talk to so badly that you would do the same?

I imagine you have heard the Bible story of the first two humans, Adam and Eve. God made Adam first, then said "It is not good for the man to be alone", and made Eve to keep him company. Our need for companionship is built right into our natures from the beginning of time. But, it is also the source of some of our greatest frustrations. Whatever went wrong?

The movie *Cast Away* is full of broken relationships. Chuck's girlfriend Kelly is divorced. His friend Stan loses his wife to cancer. The angel wing lady on the Texas ranch, Bettina, loses her husband to a Russian woman. Chuck loses Kelly. The 2 boys lose their father Al, the pilot of the crashed airplane. Even Wilson drifts out of Chuck's life. Death and estrangement- are all of our important relationships destined to fail?

Now, you just know I'm going to try to bring God into it. Perhaps you feel that praying to God is the same as talking to a volleyball. Not so.

God brings 3 important things into our human relationships: forgiveness, realistic expectations, and continuity. These 3 can transform our lives.

Forgiveness is essential. I mean, do you expect be able to carry on your important relationships without misunderstandings; without offending others in some way? It is

chilling to hear Chuck teasing Kelly about her former husband. It is understood that he was a jerk, so it was okay to go back on her marriage vows, and dump him. But, wait - is Chuck going to be a better husband to Kelly? Will he never do anything to make her angry, or disappointed? Will she grow to dislike him over time, as she did her first husband? Are all relationships doomed to failure through our inevitable failures?

Don't you want the important people in your life to be forgiving and understanding when you mess up? Certainly we all want to be treated this way. But- are you ready to be so understanding yourself when THEY mess up? Or, do you find it hard to forgive? God forgives us when we ask. Why? Because He made a way for that to happen. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. If we ask God to forgive us on that basis, He will. But He wants us to be as forgiving. He wants us to forgive others when they do us wrong. After all, we all know we are not perfect; we can't expect others to be so. It is on this basis- an understanding that we are all sinners- that we can build strong, lasting relationships. Our nearest and dearest will disappoint us- count on it. But, we do not have to get mad and reject them. We can find power in God's love for us to forgive them.

Relationships are not doomed to fail because of our failures.

Realistic expectations are essential, too. In a touching scene at the end of the movie, Kelly tells Chuck "You are the one love of my life". Then she leaves. It's "too late". She was told to let him go, to move on, so she married another man. So, what is that man, if he is not "the one love of her life"? This story sets up a heart-rending dilemma. What are these 2 people to do? Kelly goes back to her family, but will she spend the rest of her life regretting her marriage? Chuck decides he has lost her - he will move on. At the end of the movie we leave him at the crossroads, pondering whether to go north after the "angel wings" lady, Bettina (who has already been married and abandoned once). This is really complicated. How can we have confidence to come down and settle with one person? What should we

be looking for? What can we expect? Is there only one perfect person out there, and a lot of second bests? What if we get the wrong one? Can we switch partners? Are we just stuck with a dud?

One of the most fundamental mistakes people make in the marriage relationship is to think that some person can “meet their needs”; that there is a person out there that will always be there for you, that will never disappoint you. Wait a minute. Let’s turn it around. If you’re not married, imagine you are. If you are married, try this: did you wake up this morning determined to meet every felt need of your partner? Do you even want to try? I doubt it. So, you can hardly expect them to meet your needs.

God meets your needs- not people. People can help; that special person can be the best friend you have. They can be a great blessing. But you can’t count on them always. Only God can meet all your needs. Your spouse is a partner in life, to help you on your walk with God. As long as both of you are walking with God, you are walking together. If not, you will most likely go your own way, and grow apart. If God is at the center, long-term relationships are possible. They don’t have to fail.

This leads to the third factor; continuity. Western culture has become pathologically individualistic. People are told to believe the most important thing in life is their “personal development”. They must be free to pursue their goals and dreams. That means they will change as time goes by. Their partner will change , too. Is it likely two people will change in the same way? No. So, if they are married to someone who gets in the way of their dreams, they should break up with them and find someone who fits better- for the time being.

This is a recipe for disaster. Kelly was happy with her new husband and their little girl. Then Chuck shows up; the situation has changed; new dreams are born. Where does that leave Kelly’s husband? Hurt, mistrustful, insecure; and Kelly is no longer happy. If our

relationships depend on constantly changing outside circumstances, how can there be any stability, trust or confidence?

A Christian marriage is different. A promise is made; a promise is to be kept. The promise is made in a church service, before God and family. The relationship is bigger than either partner; it involves the family already born, and the new family yet to be born. It is patterned on the relationship of Jesus to the church; a relationship of faithfulness, even if circumstances change. In this environment, 2 people can grow and change with confidence, and be even more strongly committed to each other than they were on their wedding day. There is no need to fear a legitimate rival, because there is no such thing. This attitude to relationships works for family and friends, too. God meets our needs; we help each other on the journey. And as an added blessing, even death does not end our relationships. We look forward to meeting again in Heaven.

We are made for relationships; if we have no one to relate to, we may just start talking to a volleyball! But it is in the light of the greatest relationship - being a child of God - that we find out how to grow together, and not be driven apart by our many failures.