

## **New Year New Start, Part 3**

*Matthew 22:36-40*

### **1. Relationship with God.**

**- Creator**

- *Genesis 1:27; Acts 17:24-28*

**- Close**

- *Jeremiah 3:19; John 3:16*

### **2. Relationship with others.**

- *Genesis 1:1, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 2:18*

**- Companion**

### **3. Relationship with ourselves.**

- *1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; Romans 8:32; Genesis 3:8-10, 3:11-12*

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**West Valley Church**  
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## **New Year, New Start 2021**

### **Part Three**

The story goes, according to the Times of India and the Washington Post articles<sup>1</sup>, that the boy's name was Ramu. In 1954, when he was a young boy, he was found on all fours in the company of wolf cubs. He had evidently been raised with them, and had matted hair and claw-like nails. He was taken to a Government hospital, where he remained confined in a special ward for 14 years. Doctors were perplexed by his condition.

The boy had calloused knees and hands, because he had spent most of his young life on all fours. He had hideously pointed teeth with cracks in his gums, suggesting that he had bitten into stone or very hard wood. He had scars on the back of his neck, suggesting that he had been carried around by animals with sharp teeth. He spoke no discernible language and seemed unable to communicate with anyone. He had no name, so the hospital staff called him "Ramu."

Ramu showed no interest in other children and was especially frightened by adults. But one day, a hospital employee took Ramu and some other children for a visit to the zoo. The employee noticed that Ramu became extremely excited when he saw the wolf pen. Ramu called to the wolves and seemed to be able to communicate with them. This led doctors to conduct an experiment. They found that Ramu lapped milk out of a glass rather than drinking it. He tore apart his food and chewed on meat bones for hours at a time. As he got older, he would sneak out of his room at night and raid neighbors' chicken coops, stealing at eating the chickens...raw. The doctors finally concluded that Ramu was a wolf boy, who had grown up with the wild animals and, therefore, behaved more like a wolf than a human being. His therapy meant that they had to help the boy realize that he was far more than an animal, and they did that by placing him in relationships with people. Unfortunately, he never fully returned to being a human before he died.

You and I are human beings, created in the image of God, despite the fact that we've been raised in an often difficult, violent, rabidly sinful world. We live like sinners when we were created to be saints. We don't always behave as we were created to behave, and we don't always live our lives in healthy ways or in healthy community as we were originally created to. But in 2021, it's time we did.

And the way we do that is through key relationships. We are in the third message in our series called "New Year, New Start," learning how to live this year to the fulness that Christ has for us, no matter what the circumstances are. So far, we've seen God's promise from Isaiah that he will do a new thing in our lives and in our church in this year. Last week, we

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/04/21/the-mystery-of-the-wolf-boy/4c729f3c-3617-4cae-8008-361f32c074b1/>, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/living/story/19781015-during-the-last-century-nearly-50-cases-of-wolf-children-reported-in-india-823091-2014-03-12>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feral\\_child](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feral_child)

learned that we can have a perfect year, if we live all-in for Christ, completely committed to Him and living fully for him in the power of the Spirit. That means that we must live by a new rule: the rule of love. In describing how this rule of love is the most important rule of all, Jesus said it's the basis of *all* relationships:

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40, gnb)

In other words, both are of equal value and inseparable importance, and if you can live by these two rules you will be obeying everything else in the entire Bible! That's means that the church is entirely built on this principle of love. So in these two commands are three key relationships that are critical for us to be all Christ intends for us in this new year (which is what we are after, right?).

Life is made up entirely of relationships. You will always have to deal with relationships—you can't escape them. Everything we do, everywhere we go, we are in relationship with other people. You have relationships at home, at work, at school, with your parents, your spouse, your children, your neighbors, with your boss, your coworkers, the people around you at church, your small group, even when you go to the grocery store, you have some kind of relationship with other shoppers and the cashier. All those interact with your life in some way, no matter how seemingly insignificant. All of those are opportunities to touch a life or ignore one. We were created for relationship, and yet it's our fallen nature, our sin, that causes us to erode, avoid, exploit, or abuse those relationships. But the healthier our relationships, the healthier we are—literally.

The health of our relationships will have a direct impact on our physical health, as well as our emotional and spiritual health. For example, one study showed among men who were getting treatment for heart disease, those whose primary relationships were least supportive of them showed a 40% greater blockage in their arteries than those with warm, supportive relationships. Other studies have shown that those with more relational stress have greater incidence of sickness of many kinds—their immune systems are restricted from fighting off invasion. If you are an emotionally toxic person, you are literally eroding the health of the people around you.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Allan Shore of UCLA is a neuroscientist and developmental psychologist, whose research shows this need for relationship. He says, "All humans are born to form attachments, that our brains are physically wired to develop in tandem with another's through emotional communication, even before words are spoken. Our sense of right and wrong originates largely from our biologically primed need to connect with others."<sup>3</sup> Having healthy relationships is important! And the good news is that since God has created us to need relationships, He has given us instruction in His Word – the Bible – on how to have healthy relationships.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, pages 223-237

<sup>3</sup> Gary Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships*

So during the remainder of our time let's look at the three great relationships from that great commandment, and we'll start by looking at your...

## 1. Relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is the most important of all our relationships. We all have a relationship with Him, whether we want to or not, and whether we admit it or not. We may say we don't believe in Him or don't need Him, but that doesn't matter; we still have some kind of relationship with Him; it's either a good one or not.

Because God is our...

### creator

...we are bound to a relationship with him. The very first book of the Bible records the beginning of creation. God began creating with light, then added the elements, then added animals, but all of it was laying the foundation for the apex of his creation, which is men and women. Creation has reached its highest intent with us. The Bible says:

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27, niv)

When it says that he created us in his image, it means that he created us to be in a special relationship with him that is different than any other part of creation; that we are not complete unless we are in unbroken, healthy relationship with him. The fact is: We all need God whether we know it or not. And if you don't like that idea, it's only because you don't know him. Because if you did know him, you'd know how great it is to be in relationship with him.

In describing God, the Apostle Paul very wisely recognized this need when he said:

"The God who made the world and everything in it, this Master of sky and land, doesn't live in custom-made shrines or need the human race to run errands for him, as if he couldn't take care of himself. He makes the creatures; the creatures don't make him. Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living *so we could seek after God*, and not just grope around in the dark but actually find him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's near. We live and move in him, can't get away from him! One of your poets said it well: 'We're the God-created.'" (Acts 17:24-28, TM)

Without God we wouldn't exist. So if you want to exist in your healthiest state with your greatest potential, then you must be in relationship with God. And the amazing thing is that God longs for us to be in *more* than a creator/creation relationship. He wants to be in a...

### close

...relationship with us, like a father to a child! He says:

"I have *always* wanted to treat you as my children and give you the best land, the most beautiful on earth. I wanted you to call me "Father" and not turn from me." (Jeremiah 3:19, cev)

Now, we may not have a personal, close relationship with Him. And granted, our relationship with God may be rather dysfunctional, but we all have a relationship with God, nonetheless. Whether we realize it or not, our spirit yearns to be with God.

I shared this with our membership class, but I'll say it here: if you ask people what it would take to make them happy, you'll get answers like: money, good looks, popularity, power, health, prestige, sex, etc. But why is it that there are those who have these things and much more, and still can't find happiness? They still have a void—a need—for something more. Think of professional athletes; they have millions of dollars. They can't even spend all the money they have. Yet they have agents who fight for them to get higher and higher contracts. They say, "it's not about the money—it's about the principal." What principal is that?! It's *all* about money! But the money doesn't satisfy, so instead they say it's about recognition of their worth. But that won't satisfy either. At one time, Alex Rodriguez was one of the highest paid players in baseball. He got that contract because, he said, "It wasn't about the money." So they gave him what he wanted. He should've been happy, right? So why did he divorce his wife and why was he linked to affairs with several prominent women? Now he's married to Jennifer Lopez, and he's quickly gone from being "A-Rod" to being "J-Lo's husband." Still, I can confidently say that what Alex Rodriguez needs is Jesus, because we all do!

Millions of people do the same thing every day, looking for something to satisfy the longing of their spirit. It might be on a smaller, less public scale. They may not even realize it, but that "something more" they crave—that void that leaves emptiness in their lives that cannot be filled, can't be satisfied with *anything* this earth provides. It is a spiritual yearning that can only find fulfillment in God.

God knew that, which is why he sent his One and Only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty, the guilt for our sin that keeps us from relationship with Him. We owed it but could never pay it. He wanted relationship, so he paid it himself. That's what God's told us in his word, the Bible:

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." (John 3:16, gnb)

That eternal life is original life—what we were created to have—relationship with him now and on through into forever with him. If you don't have that relationship with Jesus, you can have it right now. Let's pray.

The second relationship we need, according to that greatest command that Jesus gave us, is that we need...

## **2. Relationship with *others*.**

In that creation record that we read earlier, there is an interesting statement. With every part of creation, when God finished it, he stepped back, looked at it and said:

"It is Good!" (Genesis 1:1, 4, 10, 12, 18,21, 25)

Then he made man. And he stepped back and looked at man and said:

“...it is NOT good . . . For man to be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)

In the Garden of Eden, Adam had a special relationship with God. He gave Adam everything he needed: a perfect environment, all the food he wanted, purposeful work, dominion over all the animals. And yet God looked at Adam and said, “He needs more. He needs a...

**companion**

...relationship”. This companion can come in the form of a spouse, as was the case with Adam. But God didn’t just create a wife; he created the need for a friend, and God’s plan was to provide them.

The main thing is, God has created within us an innate need for relationships—spouses, family, friends, fellow Christians, co-workers, neighbors, classmates, small group members, and so on. So we were created to be in healthy relationships with each other, as well. This doesn’t mean that every relationship is healthy, because everyone in this room has had some difficult relationships—including those with family members—husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Just like in our relationship with God, sin has marred those relationships too.

I heard the story of two elderly people living in a care facility; he was a widower and she a widow, and they had known each other for a number of years. One evening there was a community supper in the big activity center. The two were at the same table, across from one another. As the meal went on, he took a few admiring glances at her and finally gathered the courage to ask her, “Will you marry me?” After about six seconds of ‘careful consideration,’ she answered, “Yes. Yes, I will.” The meal ended and, with a few more pleasant exchanges, they went to their respective places. The next morning, he was troubled. “Did she say ‘yes’ or did she say ‘no’?” He couldn’t remember. Try as he might, he just could not recall. Not even a faint memory. With trepidation, he went to the telephone and called her.

First, he explained that he didn’t remember as well as he used to. Then he reviewed the lovely evening past. As he gained a little more courage, he asked her, “When I asked if you would marry me, did you say ‘Yes’ or did you say ‘No’?” He was delighted to hear her say, “Why, I said, ‘Yes, yes I will’ and I meant it with all my heart.” Then she continued, “I am so glad that you called, because I couldn’t remember who asked me.”

No matter what our age, we are created with a need to have relationships with others and without them life is unhealthy.

Jesus said we are to love our neighbors. So who are our neighbors? Who is it we are supposed to love? Jesus was asked that question by a man, and Jesus answered him by telling him a story—the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). You might be familiar with it. A man gets robbed and beat up and left for dead on the side of the road. Three people walk by at different times—two of them go to the other side of the road to avoid him. But the third treats his wounds, gives him food, and gets him a place to stay. So Jesus asked, “which one was a neighbor to the man who got beat up?” Which do you think? It was the one who helped, right? To which Jesus said, “Right! Now *you* go and be that neighbor.” Here’s where it’s interesting: when asked who our neighbor is, who is it we should we love, Jesus said, “*You* be a good neighbor.” *You* love and help people. So that means we need to

approach every relationship as an opportunity to be a good neighbor.

*Pray*

*You* be the initiator of healthy relationships. This is why small groups and classes here are so important – so we can learn to love each other better. But, to do that, we need a healthy...

### 3. Relationship with ourselves.

Jesus said that you are to “Love your neighbor AS yourself.” That could be the reason we have difficult relationships, because we don’t love ourselves very much, therefore, we don’t love others very much. I’m not saying we should be self-centered or narcissistic, but in order for our relationship with God and with others to be healthy, we need to love ourselves.

Gary Smalley, author, counselor, and speaker asks, “Do you have a healthy, dynamic relationship with yourself? Are you on good terms? Do you think of yourself as important? Do you like yourself? Do you accept yourself? Do you forgive yourself? Do you take good care of yourself?”<sup>4</sup> I confess to you; this is an area I continually need to work on. I am not always good to myself: physically, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally. I am often my own worst critic. But I’m working to see myself the way God sees me—as a person who is loved – so I can see my relationship with God grow stronger and so I can build healthier relationships at home and with other people.

But aren’t we just talking about having a good self-esteem? Well, I don’t like the word “self-esteem,” because that’s an esteem based on *our own* opinion of ourselves. The problem is that we are sinful, so our opinion of ourselves – our self-esteem – is going to come from our wrong thinking. Stinking thinking! Either we will think too highly of ourselves, or we will think too low of ourselves and put ourselves down. We need to base it on someone’s opinion that is trustworthy. The only one I know that can do that is God. So what is God’s opinion of you? He says he loves you with an everlasting love (*Jeremiah 31:3*). He says you are the apple of his eye. (*Psalms 17:8; Zechariah 2:8*)

Let me put it this way (I’ve said this before): the value of something is determined by the price paid for it, right? If you see a car that costs \$30,000, you decide it’s too much. So you talk the salesman down to \$20,000—because you are willing to pay that much. Well, *you* just determined the value of the car by the price you were willing to pay for it. The value of something is determined by the price you are willing to pay for it. So, if God were to pay for you, or buy you, what price do you think he would pay for you? Do you think he would barter down for you? Well, he already has paid for you, and he paid the *highest* price:

“You have been bought with a price. . .” (1Corinthians 6:20, 7:23)

“God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us.” (Romans 8:32)

So you are valuable, and God wants you to know that. So instead of “self-esteem,” we need “savior-esteem.” We need to see ourselves the way the Savior does – worth his very life. There is no higher price in all of creation. That’s why Jesus wants you to include yourself in

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<sup>4</sup> Smalley, *ibid*

the three great loves.

All three of these relationships are interrelated.

When Jesus reiterated what the first and second greatest commandments are, He stressed that “the law and prophets hang on these two commandments – Matthew 22:40. In other words, all of God’s teaching is summed up in the relationships we have with our Heavenly Father, with others and with ourselves.

Within these three great relationships, we will find true happiness and fulfillment in life. But when one of these relationships suffers it will adversely affect the other relationships:

How we feel about ourselves will affect how we are in relationship with others and with God. If we don’t like ourselves very much, we will have difficulty believing that other people will like us, and, thus, affect our relationships with others.

If we have a hard time forgiving ourselves, we will find difficulty accepting God’s forgiveness, and we won’t forgive others.

How we relate to other people can affect the way we see ourselves and affect our relationship with God, seeing him as angry, vengeful, and judgmental.

We may allow peoples’ antagonism or derogatory remarks toward us to destroy our confidence. Or we may allow their ungodly actions toward us to cause us to resist trusting God and to turn us away from him.

If our relationship with God is not right then all of our relationships will be out of kilter. The way we view God is often the way we view other people and even ourselves. If you view God as an angry God—a vengeful God who enjoys punishing people—then you will have difficulty being a person of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness toward others.

Do you have anger toward someone in your life? Ask yourself, “Why am I angry? Why am I bitter and unforgiving?” And then ask, “How is this anger impacting my other relationships?” Be honest, because my friend, it *does* impact the other two important relationships.

And, if you view God that way, you may feel so unworthy to be in relationship with Him and resign to live without him in a less than abundant way—like Ramu, living far below your potential.

Adam and Eve, as the first man and woman, learned the hard way how these three relationships are interrelated. Adam and Eve were placed in an ideal environment—it was paradise. They had an ideal, unhindered relationship with God, who walked among them. They had a perfect relationship among themselves as husband and wife—uniting and becoming one flesh. They had everything at their disposal that they could possibly need. God had given them unlimited access to every fruit tree in the garden, except one: “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God told them that they could not eat of that one tree or they would die. Then along comes the devil in the form of a serpent and deceives Eve, telling her that by eating that fruit she would become like God. So Eve ate the fruit and then gave some to Adam who was right there with her, and he also ate of the forbidden fruit.

This one act of disobedience changed drastically for all time the dynamic of these three



relationships. It changed the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God:

“That evening they heard the LORD God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the LORD God called out to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked.”” (Genesis 3:8-10, gnb)

Instead of a loving, open relationship with God, Adam and Eve now have a fear relationship with God. They are now hiding from the very One who loved them so much to create them and place them in this perfect setting. Their disobedience—their sin—had caused a separation between them and God and they are “cast out of the garden” – Genesis 3:23-24.

Their sin changed the relationship that Adam and Eve had with each other:

“Who told you that you were naked?” God asked. “Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?” The man answered, “The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” (Genesis 3:11-12 gnb)

Instead of a loving, nurturing relationship of “oneness” that Adam excitedly talked about in Genesis 2:23-24, Adam is now blaming his wife for his failure and blaming God for giving her to him – “The woman You put here with me...”. This relationship with each other is now strained.

It changed the relationship that Adam and Eve had with themselves. They can no longer look at themselves in perfect love—they are now stained with sin. They no longer walk around with confidence and self-assurance, they are now plagued with fear and hiding. They are filled with shame and are insecure—they cover themselves and begin to hide themselves from each other.

Here’s the deal: Their story is *our* story.

We were born with an inner need for these relationships—God, others, and ourselves, and like Adam and Eve, the choices we make can either strengthen these relationships or damage them. And as we learned last week, by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can learn to live perfectly in these relationships.

*Pray*

*Benediction:*

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> (Romans 15:5-6)

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<sup>5</sup> *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Romans 15:5–6.