



## Sermon Discussion Guide October 2, 2022

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# Friends – The Art of Friendship

## What Do Unhealthy Relationships Look Like & What to Do About Them

### Selected Scriptures

*"Then Delilah pouted, 'How can you tell me "I love you", when you don't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong!" She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it. Finally, Samson shared his secret with her."* **Judges 16:16**

*"Delilah lulled Samson to sleep with his head in her lap and then she called in a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. In this way she began to bring him down, and his strength left him."* **Judges 16:18**

*"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"* **2 Corinthians 6:14**

*"Do not be fooled. 'Bad companions ruin good character.'"* **I Corinthians 15: 33**

### Speak up

*"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."* **Ephesians 4:15**

### Seek wise counsel

*"Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances."* **Proverbs 11:14**

### Pray

*"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* **Luke 6:28**

## All of the Christian life is about friendship!

**The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your relationships.**

God made you for friendship. Jesus is the best friend you'll ever have. The church is nothing more than friends who are friends of Jesus.

### What do unhealthy, toxic relationships look like?

*"Then Delilah pouted, 'How can you tell me "I love you", when you don't share your secrets with me? You've made fun of me three times and you still haven't told me what makes you so strong!' She tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it. Finally, Samson shared his secret with her."* **Judges 16:16**

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### What principles can we take away from this toxic relationship?

**Unhealthy relationships usually occur when common values, priorities, dreams, and spiritual goals are not in alignment.**



Unhealthy relationships are deep alliances with people who are completely antithetical (opposite) to you, who do not have your best interests at heart, who are pushing completely different agendas.

*"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"* **2 Corinthians 6:14**

**Unhealthy relationships bring out the worst, not the best in you.**

- Samson is at his worst with Delilah—compromising his integrity. Delilah is using her body to seduce him to get what she wants.
- **Healthy relationships** don't pull you down - they **lift you up**. They inspire you to be the *best* version of yourself.

*"Do not be fooled. 'Bad companions ruin good character.'"* **1 Corinthians 15: 33**

**Unhealthy friendships use each other for their own selfish purposes.**

- **What is “normal” and “acceptable”?**
  - Meeting each other’s needs in a warm and caring environment
  - Seasons where one friend may give more than the other.
- **What is “unhealthy”?**
  - You’re using someone to get what you want or being used by someone.

**You eventually become like the people you spend the most time with - good or bad.**

**Choose your friends wisely!**

**What if I’m in an unhealthy, toxic relationship?**

**Don’t just “drift” when it’s time for some intervention!**

**Speak up**

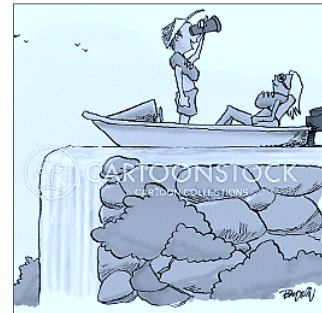
“Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

**Ephesians 4:15**

**All friendships need to be based on truth.**

**You have a right, as well as a responsibility to speak truth in a loving way.**

- Own your feelings.
- Have a conversation.
- Be clear about what you want and expect.



**Seek wise counsel**

“Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.” **Proverbs 11:14**

**When do we particularly need counsel?**



- Too emotionally involved to see clearly
- Unsure what to do and how to handle the nuances of a difficult relationship.
- May need to distance from or cut off a very toxic relationship
- Need to navigate a potential divorce

**No one gets to clarity alone!**

## Pray

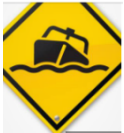
*"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Luke 6:28*

### If you're contributing to the toxic relationship:

*"Dear Jesus. You are full of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and full of love. You love imperfect people extravagantly. I am often blind to my own role in toxic relationships.*

***Help me see the truth about myself. Apply the healing power of Your Word to my heart and mind. Deliver me from any stronghold that causes me to harm people with my words and actions. Save me from self-destructive patterns."***

### If you're in an unhealthy relationship:



*"I struggle in my relationship with \_\_\_\_\_. I need You to **give me wisdom** on how to love them well. You are my shield and defender. Show me how, when, and where to set **boundaries** in our relationship. **Fill me with Your truth** and compel me to fearlessly tell the truth with love. Let Your perfect love **cast out all my fears** related to our relationship. **I surrender** what I think our relationship should be. **Please transform it** so that it honors You.*

*In Jesus' Name, Amen."*

## Discussion

The most effective way to defend from "toxicity" in relationships is to focus on keeping them healthy! **Did you have an opportunity to apply any of the principles of health - from last week's sermon - to a relationship this past week?**

- If not, what principle could you revisit this week?
- Consider sharing your experience to encourage others.

### Warning signs -

**How can you determine whether or not a friendship with an unbeliever is developing into a "deep, unequal alliance"?**

- How close is "too close"?
- What signs should you watch for as "warning signals" in this type of relationship?

**What exactly does it mean, to: "Speak the truth in love"? Ephesians 4:15**

- What concerns or emotions can interfere with "speaking up" in a toxic relationship?
  - What steps might you take to address and overcome those barriers?

- What words or phrasing might you use to initiate a difficult conversation in a relationship that has become unhealthy?

**If you were navigating a challenging relationship right now – What options would you have for “wise counsel”?**

- Who would you likely turn to for counsel – and why would you choose that individual?

**Scripture tells us to “Pray for those who abuse you”. Luke 6:28. It is one thing to pray *about* a toxic relationship – but can be more challenging to pray *for* that person despite our own feelings, emotions, hurt and pain.**

- How can we move beyond those emotions to pray *for* that individual?
- *What, exactly, can we pray for?*

**Can you share an example of a relationship that started to become “unhealthy” – but that you were able to salvage and redirect?** (Without sharing sensitive specifics)

- What were the initial “unhealthy symptoms”?
- What steps did you (and/or the other person) take to redeem the relationship?
- If you initiated - How did the other person respond?
- What was the outcome of your effort?
- What did you learn from that experience?

**How, specifically, can the Holy Spirit help us as we navigate our difficult relationships?**

(Tough question 😊) – **We can be blind to our own shortcomings in relationships. Have you had an unhealthy relationship where you realized YOU were the primary “issue”?**

- How did you manage to arrive at that understanding?
- What did you do about it?
- In retrospect, with the knowledge and maturity you have now – Would you approach this type of situation differently in the future? How?

**Digging deeper – scenario:**

**You have lunch on a regular basis with a close friend. Lately, you’ve noticed that he/she frequently complains about another close friendship OR his/her marriage.**

- **How would you approach this situation?**
  - When does a supportive discussion cross the line and become gossip?
  - How would you decide whether to redirect the conversations or to probe further with questions?
  - How might you phrase a constructive response? What wording could you use?
  - Would you offer advice?
    - If so, what suggestions might be appropriate and helpful?

## Suggestions for Home

Prayerfully do a “self-inventory” of your relationships. Do you have a toxic or less-than-healthy relationship that needs your focused attention? Review the sermon points – write down a plan – follow through.

Earlier this year, Pastor Mark focus on the seven primary sins - pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, lust, sloth, and greed. Select one of your closest relationships and consciously evaluate *your* contribution to any challenges. Which of those seven sins may be an issue in your own life within that relationship? Take time to revisit and address that specific sin. (Sermons online can be very helpful for review!)

Pray the appropriate prayer (below) throughout the week. Memorize the primary points (in bold) to lift up in prayer frequently, “in real time”, as you face challenges.

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