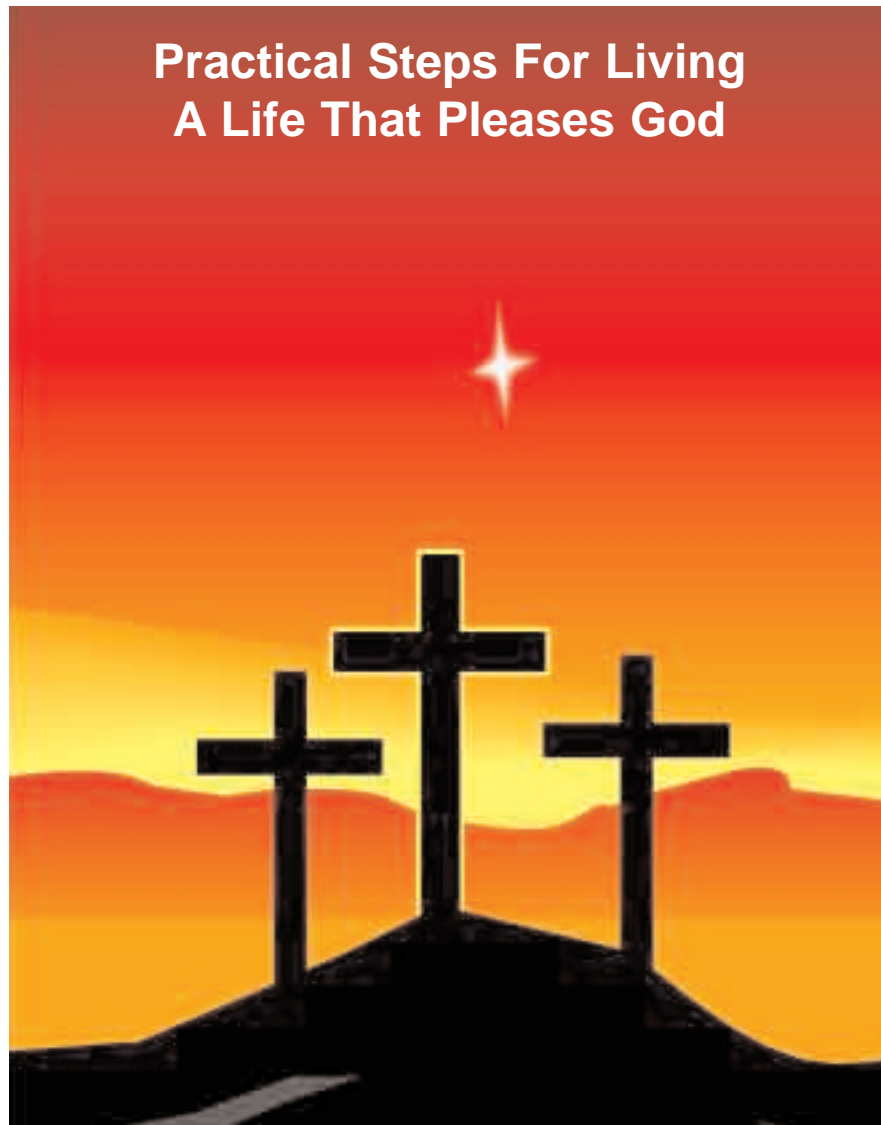


Lifebytes

23. *Are God's Relational Priorities Your Way Of Life?*



Restoration Ministries International

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Dear Friends,

For the past 11 years we've been sharing the priorities that enabled the earliest followers of Jesus to be so relationally intimate and spiritually powerful. As you examine **The Restoration Diagram**, which highlights the relational priorities of the earliest followers of Jesus, you'll see it provides a framework for relationships.

The closer the relationship is to the center of the diagram, the more vital it is. The further the relationship is from the center, the lesser its priority in your life. The essence of strong, intimate relationships such as marriage, family, and intimate fellowship, is based on these premises:

1. *No one* can treat all people with the same degree of care and concern.
2. Key factors of intimate relationships are *time commitment* and *burden-bearing*.

Our God, the Creator of our being, clearly recognizes our limitations. That's why He established a framework of priorities among the Hebraic followers of Jesus so that His children could experience intimacy with Him and with one another. Think of each part of the diagram as providing a God-given structure to your relational commitments. Even though the practice of prioritizing *interconnectedness* has been lost for centuries, our Father wants it restored!

Let's use an analogy that may help you better appreciate the effectiveness of the diagram. Imagine the five different relational priorities as bones in your body. Bones provide necessary structure

to contain your organs and to enable your body to function.

A body without bones is nothing more than a pile of organic tissue. Without bone structure your body is unable to accomplish that for which it was intended. Ponder this for a moment: What can a body do if it has no bones?

When it comes to the relational priorities our Father ordained for those who would follow Jesus, the same principle of anatomic connection is true. These five priorities provide the necessary relational framework for you to live in a way that glorifies our Father.

The five distinct levels of relationship also establish the **freedom** and **boundaries** for relational interaction. Most adults don't give much thought

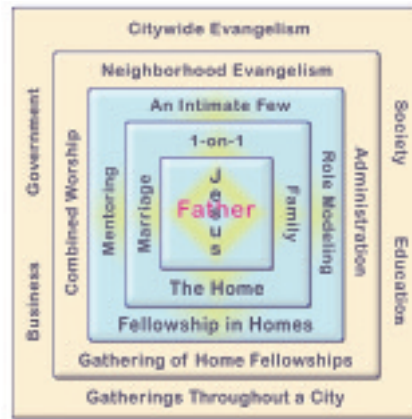
to freedom and boundary in our relationships. Why? Because most of the ways we deal with others have been ingrained from childhood. We often don't even remember how or when the freedom and boundaries we live by were etched into our lives.

For instance:

- A married man wouldn't exercise the freedoms he has with his wife the same way he would with his mother or sister. If he did, he'd cross God-given boundaries.
- A mother wouldn't casually give her baby away to a stranger. We'd recognize that she'd crossed a moral boundary if she did.
- You'd cringe if you saw a five-year-old exercising authority over his parents. You'd know something was wrong in that family!

The Restoration Diagram

The Relational Priorities of the Earliest Church



Our God is a stickler on the matter of freedom and boundary—even a brief examination of His Word demonstrates both His love and His chastisement as He makes His ways crystal clear. That’s why He has included a need for us to prioritize the relationships we have.

Of God’s 613 commands in the first five books of the Older Testament, 60% establish *boundaries* for relationships in the form of “don’ts”. (The other 40% are commands to “do”, both in regard to God and to others.)

The 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament as well cite the framework of freedom and boundary in relationship with God and with those with whom we interact.

Keep in mind that our holy God demands *righteousness* in our relationships. Whenever we go outside God’s boundaries, we create apprehension in others. Apprehension not only hinders love, but also diminishes any growth in Christ’s likeness.

[For more on the destructive influence of apprehension, see our Teaching E-mails: **10. *Apprehension: The Silent Destroyer*** (June 25, 2005); **19. *Replacing Apprehension With Love*** (December 22, 2005)].

Picture the **Restoration Diagram** as a multi-tiered wedding cake. The demarcation between each layer is a *boundary* of sorts. The health of the layers as they radiate outward from the center is dependent on how healthy and vibrant the layers closer to the top are. Lower layers can’t compete for time or attention with the higher layers. In fact, God requires that less vital relational layers support the layers closer to the center.

What Hinders The Relational Priorities From Being Lived Out?

We’ve encountered many with whom we’ve shared the Relational Priorities who have failed to implement them either in their own lives or in their families. What’s prevented them? A **fear of people’s reaction** and a **desire to hold onto pet sins**.

1. Fear of People

When you decide to re-align your relational priorities according to God’s design, there is the distinct possibility you’ll be misunderstood by others. It’s not only the *people* who get shuffled in priority that can create friction, but also the *criteria* for why some are more special than others.

You may have found that after you became a follower of Jesus, you encountered tension with your unbelieving family and/or friends. Wholeheartedly putting your trust in Jesus brings with it a new set of biblical goals and values that our Lord wants to become part of your way of life.

Jesus creates a whole new criteria for “family” for His followers:

*“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. **For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother**’” (Matthew 12:48-50).*

As His followers attempt to apply and live by His words, misunderstanding and hurt feelings can occur. [Mike’s parents didn’t talk to him for a year!]

In this psychologically-sensitive Christian culture, people are more fearful of *hurting people’s feelings* than they

are of *keeping God's requirements*. The fear of others causes the majority of Christians to avoid what they perceive as *rejecting* people. And concern for what others think traps them into relational paralysis : **“Fear of man will prove to be a snare”** (Proverbs 29:25).

But those who press on in living for Jesus face the pressure of resistant family and friends out of *love for Him*. An old worship song professes, *“Though none go with me, still I will follow; No turning back, no turning back...”* These words have special meaning for those who refuse to fear people.

2. Clinging To Pet Sins

A few days ago a man called to tell us that our books, *Restoring the Early Church* and *Pastoring By Elders*, were cited in another writer's volume on house churches. We're personally acquainted with this author, and his perspective of house churches differs totally with anything our own research uncovered. Since he eliminates the biblical parameters for relational authority and repentance in faith communities, we were surprised he included our material for reference.

During this phone conversation, I [Mike] shared the Hebraic foundations and God's purpose for the extended spiritual family that gathers in homes: *communal righteousness* that brings about answered prayer, and *load-bearing relationships* that are the means for the 54 “one-another” commands in the Newer Testament. The caller really stumbled over repentance and communal righteousness. After almost two hours of discussion, he concluded, “I'm going to go with (the other author); his methods will be more popular.”

We can tell you with assurance that the Hebraic home fellowship is so spo-

radically being restored is because people don't want to deal with their sins.

- **People who enjoy their pet sins don't want to be held accountable to repent.**
- **People who refuse to turn away from pet sins won't acknowledge that their unrepentance hinders the prayers of others in their extended spiritual family from being answered.**

When sin is tolerated, it's that much easier for others to excuse their own iniquity. Those who forsake pet sins and turn from them understand the privilege and responsibility of relational connectedness.

Scrutinize Your Own Relationships

Conscientiously and prayerfully evaluate your own close relationships. How trustworthy are you in maintaining God's freedom and boundaries? Don't rush through this section. If possible, ask your family and those in close fellowship to go through this with you.

- **First, do you believe our Father is restoring the Hebraic foundations to His children today? Yes or No?**

Our Father and Jesus

- **On a scale of 0 to 100, where in your daily priorities would you honestly place God? (Circle the number).**

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

- **Do you think our Lord agrees with your answer? Yes or No? If no, what number do you think *He* would give you? _____**



- Describe in as much detail as possible your daily relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus. Include your feelings toward God, as well as how you express your gratefulness to Him.

- Can you describe through examples how anyone would recognize that you indeed have a relationship with God?

- As it pertains to your relationship with God, list your personal areas of weakness or concern. How does your relationship now compare to your past? If it's changed, how has it changed?

- If you indicated that our Lord would give you a lower number than you gave yourself, describe the aspects of your home that He would be displeased with.

- If you've gone through our workbook, *Demolishing Strongholds*, list the primary strongholds in yourself, your marriage and family. What, if any, strongholds are still present in your home?

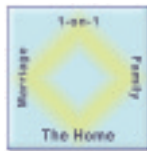
- How has your spouse or others who live with you helped you meet your seven God-given needs? How are you helping your spouse and/or others meet their needs?

- Describe in as much detail as possible your *spiritual home life*. How is our Lord part of your home life? Would Jesus feel comfortable in your home? Why or why not?

Your Home

- On a scale of 0 to 100, how God-dependent are you as an individual, or as a family? (Circle the number).

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



- Do you think our Lord agrees with your answer? Yes or No? What number do you think *He* would give you? _____

- If you're married or live with others, how do you mutually encourage each other in actively living out your faith? Even children can encourage others. [When our son was five he located some free Bibles and went door-to-door giving them out to the neighbors. We were spurred on by his example!]

- If you're married, describe the faith walk of your spouse. (If you're single, describe a person who is in very close fellowship with you and has a strong influence on your spiritual walk.)

- Describe the frequency with which you know God is answering your prayers. How readily do you see His activity around you in divine encounters or divine timing in which you recognize His hand?

Your Fellowship In Homes

- No matter how you define it, do you *fellowship* with a few others frequently on an intimate basis? Yes or No? If not, why not?



- If your answer is yes, describe the basis for your fellowship with others. Why do you get together? Are your criteria *biblical*?

- If your extended spiritual family has gone through our workbook, *Demolishing Strongholds*, are any strongholds still present? Which ones? What should you as a community in Jesus do about it?

- How are the people in your fellowship helping you meet your seven God-given needs? How are you helping the other people meet their needs?

- Is your fellowship with others based on the assurance that each person will do all within his or her power to not hinder the prayers of others by holding on to unconfessed sin? Yes or No? Why is this important?

• Are there people in your fellowship family who you suspect are doing something that is a sin against God? Yes or No?

• If your answer is “yes”, have you addressed your concern to them? Yes or No? If you confronted someone in your extended spiritual family about his sin and he refused to listen, what would you do next?

• What would your fellowship family do about a person who refuses to repent?

• Have you (or would you) turn to any of the people in your fellowship in your deepest, darkest moments? Yes or No? If your answer is “yes”, list their names and describe why you have or would turn to them.

• Are there other followers of Jesus in whom you have more confidence than those in your home fellowship? If yes, list their names and describe why you feel as you do.

• Describe your true feelings about the individuals in your fellowship of extended spiritual family.

• Describe how the people in your fellowship family have helped you grow in greater Christ likeness.

• What testimonies have you shared with others that have evidenced God’s faithfulness to you? What testimonies have others shared that have caused you to live more boldly for the Lord?

• Has your fellowship family grown over time? Yes or No? If “yes”, has it grown through new people putting their trust in Jesus, or from other Christians who have migrated into it?

- **How would you recognize activity of the Holy Spirit in your fellowship family?**

- **Describe in detail the aspects of your fellowship that you feel our Lord would be pleased with. And, write down what He would be displeased with.**

- **Does seeing this on paper prompt you to take this up with your extended spiritual family for some “course correction”?**
