

Marion weekly update

April 14 - "Healing: Relationships" Philippians 4:2-3, Matthew 18:15-17, 21-22, Romans 12:20-21

This week in our series on healing we are looking at the healing of relationships. While frequently we think of couples when we talk about broken relationships, the truth is that all relationships have this unfortunate potential. Friends, family, coworkers, teammates, and partners alike. The dimensions of these relationships differ, however I suggest that the principles we draw from scripture today apply across the board. What we'll do is start from the most unfortunate aspect and build forward from there.

Beginning with a contrast, there is a set of relationships in scripture that mark the best of health and also the worst of brokenness. David had relationship with both Saul and his son Jonathan. David and Jonathan had a relationship that is widely thought to be one of the if not THE closest relationships in scripture. They were marked by abiding love for one another and a fierce loyalty such that when Saul was in the wrong Jonathan sided with David even at risk of his own life.

On the other hand David's relationship with Saul was marked by sadness and tragedy. At first their connection was good and strong. Saul loved David greatly. He kept David close to play his lyre when Saul was troubled. He made David one of his armor bearers, which was a tight, intimate position to the king. They were on great terms. Then came Saul's jealousy over David and the relationship broke. Not on David's part, but on Saul's. David I believe wanted nothing more than to reconcile with Saul. He was determined that no matter what Saul did to him he wasn't going to do harm to Saul. Unfortunately Saul wanted nothing to do with mending their relationship. They remained at odds until Saul's death.

Here is our sad first lesson. Not all relationships that are broken will heal. Even if one person wants it desperately it may never happen. Why? Healing can only happen if all parties involved want it. If one party doesn't and holds on to grudges, anger, and resentment it won't happen. Sometimes relationships break and stay broken. In this light something to stop short of is the cliché "well I guess it just wasn't meant to be." God doesn't want broken relationships. Brokenness is never "meant to be" in God's sensibility. The desire is always meant to be reconciliation and healing.

This brings us one layer out. All relationships don't have to stay broken, but sometimes they need space. This is hand in glove with the passage regarding accountability in Matthew. If a brother sins against you go to him, if he won't respond take a couple witnesses, if he still won't take him before the church, if he still won't have nothing to do with him. The intent of this is important.

It isn't saying kick him to the curb permanently. It's not a clean write off. The hope is that the separation will bring conviction that causes a change of heart. With the change of heart the hope is for the relationship to be restored and the connection renewed. It's the same in any relationship. When offense after offense is given it might be time to take a break. The one offended needs space to heal from the wounds inflicted. It's impossible for this to happen if every time some healing happens that wound is opened again and again. On the other side it gives the offending party time to really consider what is going on and the cost of holding on to whatever hurtful values or actions have caused the damage. Sometimes time and space are essential to heal a relationship. But time and space always with the component of hope.

Not to rehash, but what we spoke of last week regarding healing our land applies here as well. Prayer for one another, humility, and owning our part in any conflict that causes hurt and brokenness is essential in any relational healing. Turning from bad behavior and actions to Godly actions that reflect genuine love of neighbor are crucial and essential in healing any wound.

This seemingly odd little verse in Philippians holds another key to healing. It mentions, here and nowhere else, Euodia and Synteché. The desire is to help them settle their disagreement. The letter would have been read to the whole church, which means this isn't just a call to the two women but also a heads up to the church as a whole. Why? Because sometimes we need outside help healing wounds in a relationship.

We need people around us who when we have disagreements or fights see the situation more clearly. People who can give us perspective and call us out where we need to be called out. Of course it's then our responsibility to respond to being called out. People can see things we ourselves cannot because of our state of mind and emotionality. This may be friends, family, church family, whomever is close to the situation and can step in objectively. This also looks like mediators, therapists, and counselors who are skilled at helping people see one another, hear one another, and guide them through brokenness to a place of wholeness.

And sometimes the outside help is helpful to make sure the brokenness doesn't occur.

I have a friend that I trained with in HapKiDo. He and his wife have an amazing marriage. We hadn't seen one another in a very long time until we met at a wedding. We spent a long time catching up and he shared something with me. He would share with folks that he and his wife were in couple's therapy. Everyone was shocked. "Why? You have such an amazing marriage!" His response is "why do you think we have an amazing marriage? By being in therapy together problems are headed off before they ever start or gain traction..." If that isn't an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure nothing is.

Romans gives us another key to healing, and that key is kindness. "If your enemy is thirsty give him a drink, if he is hungry feed him." It says to do so is to "heap burning coals on their head." When we've been wronged we have a choice to be nasty, ignore, even harm back. God's way is that no matter what someone has done to us, treat them with kindness. Doing this is so counter the world it's bound to mess with someone's head. The burning coals are shame and conviction. "How can I treat this person so poorly when all they are doing is being kind to me?" The hope is that in being true to the love Jesus calls us to it will rub off on the other and help them turn around. Hopefully it leads to reconciliation of whatever wounds exist. Hopefully it heals the brokenness.

Perhaps one of the biggest factors in healing relationships comes from Jesus' answer to how many times we should forgive someone. Seven times? No seventy times seven. In other words there is no limit. If we are wronged we must be willing to let it go and move forward with grace. Consider how many times we have wronged God by not living into God's desires for our lives. Is there a limit to God's forgiveness? Of course not. And we are to be imitators of God. Without forgiveness healing is dead in the water. To move on in love and relationship we have to be able to let bygones be bygones. We have to move forward without holding things over one another's heads.

Though this brings us full circle to our first key to healing. If the hurt keeps coming we may need to create space to find forgiveness as continual wounding makes this difficult. Forgiveness is not constantly setting ourselves up to be victimized over and over again.

There have been quite a few suggestions from scripture to help in healing our relationships. They are an answer to a question that people wonder. "We're told to love each other but what does that look like?"

It looks like giving space where space is needed

It looks like confessing to one another and working to live the way God calls us to in community

It looks like asking for and accepting help from our community to settle our differences

It looks like kindness even when we have been wronged

It looks like being radically forgiving

This is what it means to overcome evil with good. This is what it means to "at least so far is it's up to us to live at peace with all people."

BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel 15

Chapter 15 is thick with the need to interpret within an understanding of culture, timing of the writing, purpose of the writing, and seeing how it reveals a complicated Saul. There are troubling passages, but not if we're seeing them in proper context.

There is a compilation of disturbing circumstances here. The first is that the punishment on the

Amalekites is for something the Amalekites of that time had nothing to do with. The Exodus from Egypt happened a very long time before, and just now they are getting vengeance? The consequence seems unjust in light of a just God. The punishment sounds like nothing less than complete eradication, or genocide, of the Amalekites. How does killing women, children, and infants reconcile with a merciful God? Particularly ones who hadn't participated in the events for which the consequence is being given? And the livestock as well?

First we need to understand that the idea of completely eradicating an enemy was a known reality in that world. Vengeance was a trend, and leaving behind those who could grow to exact that vengeance was not advisable. Was this a God given command or a cultural reality creeping in to the message? We are left to decide.

More than the cultural reality we need to look at what the purpose of the writer is in this part of the book. The larger point at play is Saul. Is Saul fit to be king? Is Saul obedient? The story is telling of a battle with the Amalekites, but the purpose is to see if Saul understands his role before God as king. So the story is told, perhaps embellished, for the reason of COMPLETENESS. What kind of obedience does God desire? COMPLETE. So the task given to Saul is one of completeness. Will he be obedient or will he not? And what will Saul's actions reveal about his faith and his own character? Perhaps starting out well Saul warns innocents among the Amalekites, the Kenites, to run or they too will be cut down. It seems his intent is to follow through completely. Quickly we see his first hitch. He kills "everyone" except King Agag. Saul has already failed the test. I put everyone in quotes because the reality is that the Amalekites return again to annoy Israel. Thus he couldn't have killed them all. This isn't acknowledged in the story. And this isn't an issue when we consider the purpose of the writing. It's to reveal the character of Saul to those reading it long after the events to understand why this first king fell into disfavor as fast as he did. Thus the sparing of Agag is sufficient to make that point.

The best of the animals were also spared. Failure number two. What is unsettling is the language that all that was valuable was spared, and that was good animals not children and infants. Again, remember the purpose of this. To shine light on Saul.

When God sends word to Samuel there is a very important undertone to the exchange. Sometimes we get confused when God "repents" or is "sorry" to have put someone in a position. We see this with Saul. We saw this with humanity in the story of Noah and the great flood. Why would God be sorry? Shouldn't God have known? This gets sticky and begins to smack of predestination where we have no option but to play a role like actors on a scripted stage. It's not that simple.

In Saul, God saw potential to be a king. He saw the potential to be the military protector of Israel, of which Saul seemed capable. Samuel was there as a spiritual guide to follow and obey when the Word of the LORD would come. The stage was set for Saul to thrive. There was a problem. Like each and every person Saul was able to choose obedience or disobedience. In scripture God says "I know the PLANS I have for you." God's plans are there for us to accept and follow or reject. If we reject there are consequences to bear, and often not just for ourselves. Consequences too often are shared by those around us. Saul chose poorly, and so it's as if a boss looking at an employee just promoted and saying "I saw so much potential in you and I regret putting you in that position as you were clearly not up to the task."

What follows is revealing about why Saul may have been so unfit to be king. Let's enumerate several events that follow.

Saul sets up a monument to himself

Samuel calls out Saul for not doing as he was told

Saul blames the people for sparing the animals and tries to pad the issue by claiming they were going to sacrifice them to God

Samuel corrects Saul again for not obeying COMPLETELY

Saul claims Samuel is wrong, yet in the same breath admits guilt that Agag is spared

Saul again blames the people for taking the good livestock

Now let's frame all of these up in a verse in the middle of all of this. Samuel says to Saul "though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel?" Remember also that when Saul was chosen to be king by lots he was hiding. They had to search him out because he wasn't stepping forward on his own.

I suggest that what we are seeing here is an insecure Saul. He may not believe he deserves to be king, has the skills to be king, or some other reason for feeling unworthy in himself. That God put him in the role is irrelevant. What is inside of him is driving and perhaps at times crippling. Can't we relate to this? Someone else has more faith in us than we do in ourselves. In those instances it's very human and very easy to slide into responding to our own insecurity and in the process relinquish some of the potential and fulfillment we might otherwise realize.

Saul builds a monument to himself. He spares Agag and likely parades him through the camp, showing his trophy of victory. It may very well be true that the people wanted to spare the livestock, for sacrifice or some other reason. If Saul is insecure and needs to please the people what does he do? He gives in so he looks good in their eyes. All of this speaks loudly to an insecure man trying to bolster his image and self-image to fill his newfound role as king.

It also explains his waffling nature. Sometimes he's obedient, other times he's not. Is it the pressure? Is it self-doubt? Is it self-doubt that he is trying to overcome with some sense of inflated ego? Whatever it is, it's a flaw that has caused Saul to reject God's commands and now has the consequence of him being rejected by God as king.

The message to the people who would read this book of their people's history down the road after being consequenced for falling away from God? God requires complete obedience. When God says have NO one, NO thing, and NO idols above God, God means NONE. In Saul's case his idol may have been pride, or self image, or self elevation. His priority wasn't following God, it was following self. We are reminded in this example that idolatry isn't just a statue or someone else's idea of a god. It can be anything placed about God that causes us to choose it over God's desire for our lives.

Finally Saul confesses he's sinned and asks Samuel to lead him in worship. It's a last ditch effort to get in God's good graces again, but the judgment is set. Even here we see that need for affirmation creep in. In addition to asking Samuel to go with him to worship he requests that Samuel uplift him to the elders of Israel. He wants his public image to be good no matter what. Samuel yields.

In perhaps yet one more image of completeness, Samuel calls for Agag. A grisly scene unfolds where he "hews" Agag in pieces. This is not some simple beheading. This is an example. He doesn't just execute Agag. He destroys him completely. Again we see that this chapter is about a battle with the Amalekites, the demise of Saul, and at the heart of it the message to all people that devotion to God is to be absolute and complete.

Sadly Saul and Samuel part ways. They never saw each other again until the day of Samuel's death. Through all these ups and down we see that Samuel must have loved Saul. He grieved over him. Despite this tragedy, the stage is now set for David to arrive, hailed broadly as the greatest king of Israel.

BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel 16

Chapter 16 brings to the story the one who is such a focal point of this early history of Israel, David. There are, as always, interesting details afoot in this telling. Like we saw in Chapter 15 there is the need to remember that as we see things unfold we need to remember purpose of authorship, culture, and this become more evident when we move into chapter 17 and compare details.

Samuel is mourning Saul still. God has moved on. He calls on Samuel to head off to anoint a new king. Samuel's response tells us something about the nature of his present relationship with Saul. It's tumultuous. It doesn't seem Saul is prone to be friendly to Samuel in this circumstance. This to the point that Samuel is fearing for his own life. Whatever their prior connection, presently he is under no illusions that he would be spared. After all, to proclaim a new king while the present king is alive and throned is nothing less than treason. Keeping in mind Saul's fickle and impulsive nature Samuel probably has good reason for his hesitation.

A little later this is reinforced by how Samuel is greeted at the city gates. Is he coming in peace? They are themselves frightened. Perhaps they heard about Samuel executing Agag? This prophet isn't one to be trifled with. Or perhaps the feud between Saul and Samuel has become known to the larger group of people. If this is the case and Samuel is on the outs with an angry Saul, it might be possible that his arrival would bring a vengeful Saul on his heels. No one wants any part of that. Whatever the case, it's clear that there is tension afoot.

The "out" he is given is to go under the guise of a sacrifice. If there is a concern that God is participating in some kind of deception or lie that can be put to rest. Remember when Saul and Samuel first met as Saul was looking for some donkeys? Samuel had anticipated his coming as the one God was ushering in as the first king. They had already sacrificed an animal and set up a banquet. Saul comes in and is whisked in as the guest of honor and given the best hunk of meat from the animal. In other words, sacrifice was part of the ritual of anointing a king. He can claim he is going to sacrifice honestly.

Setting Jesse's family apart for the selection of the new king, a parade of seven sons occurs. None of them are the one. The first son Eliab is a nod to the mistake of Saul. Samuel's assumption that his height and appearance make him the obvious choice. Saul was tall and with a good appearance. He was no prize. Eliab is a quick example that God's criteria are different than a human's, even Samuel's. This time it wouldn't be someone to appease the people's expectations. He would meet God's and God's alone. The heart is of primary concern.

The unexpected is selected. The youngest son relegated to watching the sheep while the older ones go to the "important" business. Some interesting parallels between Saul and David exist here. Both had to be fetched. Saul was hiding in the baggage(as we saw last chapter this was a sign of his character). David was doing his duty watching the sheep(also a sign of his character). When Saul was selected the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily. When David is anointed the Spirit of the LORD comes upon him mightily. There is intentional noting of both similarities and contrasts of these two kings.

Once again we see a troubling passage. God's Spirit departs from Saul. This makes sense. In rejecting Saul as king the power to empower him is similarly removed. But we see that God "sends an evil spirit to torment him." This doesn't reconcile with God revealed in Jesus. All good things come from God. We are led away from God by our "own desires." "Let no one say he is tempted of God." This doesn't sound like a tormenting God sending evil spirits. So what gives?

First, we know Saul's temperament already got in the way of his ability to lead even when the Spirit of the LORD rested upon him. He had issues that were likely being mitigated by God's Spirit despite his own spiritual shortcomings. When that mitigating Spirit is lifted what else would happen? Naturally the fullness of Saul's troubled sensibilities would roar to the surface.

Second, the spirit language is used to remind us that Saul's problem isn't just in temperament of mind. It is also deeply spiritual. He has a very troubled relationship with God that got in the way of being a Godly king. He preferred his own way over God's. This is a spiritual issue that hasn't resolved and sadly will never be in Saul's lifetime.

Finally, the cure is a sign of their interpretation. It was believed that when someone was troubled by spirits the way to soothe them was with music. Thus they seek out a skilled musician to come play for Saul. David is the one recommended. If we want a modern equivalence, think about what a tremendous number of people use to cope with emotion. Music. We no longer need to send for a skilled musician. We turn on a radio, an iPod, Spotify, whatever we use and get our playlist going. In a way David for Saul was the equivalent of wireless earbuds playing tunes to calm him down.

David's description is also intentional and foreshadowing. He's not just a musician. He is a brave warrior. Well spoken. The LORD is with him. This man is a leader. What we will see from him down the road is all of these coming together to make a well-rounded king for Israel. Most importantly, not only is the LORD with David, but David is with the LORD.

In a note of irony it's not until the end of the chapter that someone utters David's name aloud for the first time. This person is Saul, the king David is anointed to replace.

Let's take a moment to consider what's about to happen, and what it must have been like for David and

his family. If your son was anointed king you'd most likely shout it from the rooftops in pride and celebration. What a tremendous honor on the family! What an achievement to see your child climb to such a height! It should be joyous. Not in this case.

What happens if a young existing king finds out someone else is slated to replace him? That's not a good place for the new king and his family. Kings were known to eliminate their competition. To expose David for who he has been anointed to be is a death sentence. The temptation is to say that if David is the true king why not just take Saul out and assume the throne? Keep in mind the rest of the people are likely not in on the rejection by God. If Saul is killed it's not David stepping in as the assassin, it's Saul's son. The argument might be for David to announce that he's been anointed. How would that go over? Someone kills royalty and then says "God told me to so I could take over!!!" It sounds insane.

No, David and his family have to keep quiet. Besides, Samuel said David was king but he didn't say how, when, or where. David is next to the throne even if not on it.

The chapter ends on a note happy in the moment but tragic in the end. Saul loves David. He wants him consistently with him to soothe him. David becomes his armor bearer, which we know from an earlier chapter is an intimate and close position. Their relationship starts out beautifully, if not under tense circumstances that Saul is unaware of. We know it's not long before the relationship sours. That it begins so well is a genuine sadness.