

Healthy relationships: Characteristics and Warnings

By definition: a relationship is a state of being related, connected, and allied to someone.

The main relationship of course is one between God and man; the Saviour and the saved ones.

When it is good from our end, then all is good, and all other relationships will flow from that.

A healthy and satisfying relationship is a two-way relationship, i.e. it is reciprocal. It is hard to have a relationship with a rock, although there was a fad at one stage when people were buying pet-rocks!

There are many types of relationships of course, and we can read a whole book on each one – husband/ wife, relationship between siblings; parent / child relationship; pastor / church members; teacher /pupil; relationship between believers, relationship between ministries etc. Each type of relationship will have its own appropriate parameters. In the Word of God there are rules and guidelines for all of these, and when we follow the Maker’s Manual we have better results and thus avoid frustrations.

Let’s look at some characteristics of a healthy relationship:

Even when we casually observe people at work or church or some other place where we see them regularly,

We do not have to be a prophet to recognise a good friendship, or a good a marriage, or a good parent/ child, or employer /employees relationship. Some things stand out. What are they? It is being relaxed in each other's company, it is not being afraid to make a mistake; it is a desire to share and to communicate.

If we, on several occasions, observe interactions in such a group of people, who are in a healthy relationship, we would see some cues in the body language, in ease of communication, in the time spent together etc. The basis or the foundation for all this would be: trust, love, acceptance, honesty in communication, commitment, empathy, and faithfulness.

But since it takes "two to tango" as the saying goes, if one side is lame, and will not do the steps, it will not flow. So for a relationship to be healthy it has to be reciprocated in trust, love, acceptance, honesty in communication, commitment, and faithfulness.

As an example, of what began, as a good relationship between a leader and his follower, let us look at a historical example of King Saul and David. The time is after David killed Goliath. On seeing this, Saul was very impressed with the young man, and rightly so, and Saul wanted David in his service.

We read in **1Sam18:2**, "From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house."

This was how much Saul valued David, that he wanted to keep David at his side.

v5 “Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it **so** successfully that Saul gave him a **high rank** in the army.”

It is obvious that Saul was pleased with David and so he promoted him. As a wise leader he encouraged and rewarded good and faithful work. He trusted David to do the job well. Saul was a wise leader and at this stage had a good leader/subordinate relationship with David, based on trust.

However this relationship went sour very quickly and even became dangerous for David’s life. We read in:

1Sa 18:6-8 “When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel, to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines, and lutes. (7) As they danced they sang, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” (8) And Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. And he said, “They have credited David with tens of thousands, but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?”

From David’s side, he continued to be loyal and submissive to the king. His relationship to the king was righteous but it was **one sided**. Jealousy, competition and pride had poisoned King Saul’s heart and this ruined his relationship with David. Saul became more and more suspicious and jealous of David and as a result of that, even tried to murder him. He was afraid to lose his kingship to David and thus wanted to get

rid of the “competition”. Forgetting where he himself came from, and that God is the One who chooses the king.

It was God who called Saul, God gave him that ministry, and his ministry depended on his relationship with God. By that stage of course, Saul’s relationship with God was totally dysfunctional, or totally unhealthy; and God had rejected him as king. But to Saul, keeping his position as a king and having honour from men, was more important than his relationship with God. Having turned his back on God, Saul was not able to have a healthy relationship with David. Jealousy and the fear of losing his position began to dominate him.

So a warning to a healthy relationships: beware of jealousy of another person’s success - it leads to suspicion, accusation and much worse, the least of which is a break in the relationship.

In contrast to this, is the relationship between Jonathan and David.

We read in **1Sam18:1**”Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself” v3 “and Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. v4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic and even his sword, his bow and his belt.”

He gave David his sword at a time when it was such a valued weapon to possess. Jonathan, who was an heir to the throne, knew that God had chosen David over his own father. He was not jealous or covetous of the position. His trust was in God and God’s purposes for his life. He did not have to compete with David or feel inferior to him. He was not afraid to lose that which from God’s perspective did not belong to him. This

was a healthy relationship, based on trust, love, acceptance, honesty in communication, empathy, and faithfulness.

Those two examples happened almost 3000 years ago, but human nature is the same, we make the same mistakes in relationships in the 21st century AD as well!

As an example of distrust, jealousy and suspicion in ministry is a sad story of a church, in which I knew a few people and where a friend attended. In this case, it was partly because of a different view on the gifts of the Holy Spirit that distrust, jealousy and not wanting to let go resulted in destroyed relationships, hurt and even falling away from the Lord.

A large group of new migrants started attending the church in question, which was an ethnic church. These migrants were so eager in their new faith, they grew in the Lord and their love for the Lord was beautiful to see. Because they were of another ethnic group (although closely related) they had their own language, they wanted to have their own meetings in this church building, but at another time slot. By that stage they had a pastor and had sufficiently matured to be able to function as a church. But the elders of the mother church did not allow them to use the building. So what was at one stage a beautiful relationship between the believers, visiting each other's homes, having celebrations together etc. was broken. So this group left the church and started their meetings in a Scout Hall which happened to be next door to the church building.

The whole affair became a stumbling block to many, and particularly the younger believers. Many were hurt and left the church. The elders of that church themselves eventually left as well, as another pastor came in who caused a lot of division and strife and that church is still limping.

An example of a healthy relationship with the Lord and a healthy relationship towards another ministry happened back in the 70s in the ministry of YWAM. A situation developed, in which YWAM had to let go of their vision and instead bless another ministry--a situation where being right with God was more important than the ministry that God gave them. A situation where they were prepared to bless another ministry at their own expense, and let go of their own vision. God had shown YWAM leaders in very clear terms to have a Mercy Ministry in the form of a ship, equipped with medical and dental team. The ship was supposed to travel in underdeveloped countries and bring free practical medical help, to the people and preach the gospel as well. Being a faith mission, they never asked for money, and God provided sovereignly for them to be able to purchase such a ship. However one day as they were praying, (they had many such prayer meetings for the work,) Loren Cunningham the leader of YWAM had a vision of Jesus standing in the corner of the room, in the shadows, unnoticed by anyone, as about 2,000 YWAMers were all very excited, clapping and jumping with joy about this ship, and the ministry that God gave them. Jesus was in the shadows unnoticed by them. The ministry has become more important than their relationship with the Lord. Loren was grief-stricken and cried for about an hour; the team repented but knew that this was the death of a vision. They gave the money away to another ministry, OM who needed money for a ship as well. However some years later, God released the vision again, they purchased another ship and named it Anastasis- which in Greek means: Resurrection.

Going back in history, another example of a healthy relationship recorded in the Bible is one between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. We don't usually think of mothers-in-law in such terms in modern times, given that there are so many mother-in-law jokes.

Naomi, a widow- is in Moab, lived with her 2 widowed daughters-in-law. They are waiting out a famine which was in Israel. Naomi hears of improved situation in Israel and decides to go back. At this point the relationship is tested from both sides. We see though that, Naomi's relationship with these younger women is a healthy one. It is based on trust, openness in communication, love and honesty. She is open with them and tells them that she cannot offer them anything and that they would be better off, going back to their mothers to make a new start in life. She loves them enough in wanting to let them go, even though they are a help to her and she would be better off with them by her side. A healthy relationship is one that is not selfish, but one that desires good for the other, even if it is at times at one's own expense. This relationship was a healthy one; and it was reciprocated by Ruth. She also was not looking out for herself, but was prepared to spend the rest of her life looking after an older woman; she was committed to her for life, whatever might happen. We all know the story and the famous words.

"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God"

A healthy relationship should be based on trust and truth. Which I guess are related. We should be trustworthy in our relationships with other people. People should be able to trust, that when we say we will do something, we WILL do it. I

remember on one occasion a colleague at work invited Kon and I to a dinner party, which we accepted. When we arrived she was so overwhelmed that we actually came, and kept saying it throughout the evening. I was very surprised at her reaction, but then concluded that she obviously has been let down many times, and for her to meet someone who kept their word was something special. Later, I understood the reason for her reaction, as I observed at work, that she actually herself rarely carried out her promises.

How about us? If we say “I am happy to see you” do we really mean it?

If we say “I will call you” do we do it? If we say “I will pray for you.” Do we do it? Can we be trusted in these seemingly little things? A healthy relationship is based on trust.

A healthy relationship with God is also based on trust. Can I trust His promises to me? Can I trust His word to me? There are universal promises in the Bible for all believers of course. These also require trust or faith in God’s character, before we can take hold of them. But there are other promises, individual ones, related to our call - words that God has been giving us over a period of time. These could be to do with a promise to answer a particular prayer in regard to a need or direction in ministry.

God taught me a valuable lesson in trusting His call and direction for my life. This happened when I was in YWAM quite a few years ago now. We were on an outreach in Melbourne at the time and divided into different teams for ministry. Before I went on this outreach, the Lord gave me a word, (as part of my guidance) that I would be ministering to a group that would come from many nations. There were several teams and they all had different ministries. Some did drama on the street and then street witnessing, some stayed behind and interceded for the teams. One group went to the

docks, to work with “Mission to Seamen” visiting the ships that were in port. I really felt that I was meant to be on that team, but instead each morning I wistfully watched the team leave for the docks while my team went into the city to do street evangelism.

I decided to speak to my leader about it, giving the scriptures that God gave me and telling her that I felt I should have been on the other team. She however did not accept my reasons and told me to stay where I was put, because I was needed there. I was very disappointed, and went outside in the field to cry, and just tell God, that it is His business, if I heard Him correctly then He has to do something about it, because I tried.

Well, the next morning, as our team assembled for prayer, the team that visits the ships left earlier. I wistfully watched them again, with an ache in my heart. About an hour later, there was a phone call from the leader of that team, asking me urgently to get ready and meet them at the docks, because a Russian ship had arrived in port! A Russian speaker was needed. Halleluiah! I said in my heart, God You are faithful. You will accomplish that which You have promised. I just need to trust You!

So in conclusion:

Healthy relationships are based on trust, openness in communication, honesty, love, and acceptance.

Warnings to a healthy relationship: to beware of jealousy, distrust, unforgiveness, bitterness, competitive spirit, striving.

The Scriptures give us the best definitions for healthy relationships:-

I chose those that particularly apply to us who are in ministry:

1Cor3:7-8 "...neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour." (NIV)

Rom 15:5 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus..." (NIV)

v7 "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...(NIV)

Rom 12:9-10 "Love must be sincere.... **v10** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves."

1Pet 3:8 "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (NIV)