

Essentials in Relationships

Loyalty

This is the ability to stay with someone, to gather round and lift them up.

Beware of the false loyalty which portrays itself as a protection of the person but is only a disguise for self-protection. Being loyal to someone involves always doing what is in their best interests. It is not secretive but genuinely supportive.

Loyalty means being consistent. There can be no gossip, nor being one thing to someone's face and another behind their backs.



Commitment

This is the framework that surrounds the friendship. It is the pledge to work at a relationship through all circumstances. It stops us from flitting or ducking out when the going gets tough. It needs to be in our hearts and is sometimes expressed formally – e.g. marriage, church membership.



In church, our commitment is to Jesus Christ and to one another. It is vital to remember that our commitment is primarily to a person – not to a programme or certain activities. If programmes help us deliver our commitment that is fine – if they hinder then move the programme aside so we can focus on the needs of the person.

A suggested simple commitment is to 'uphold one another in love'. Our attitudes and actions can be measured against that yardstick. We are committed to working for the other person's best interests.

Trust

Relationships are based on trust. The Bible often uses the word 'faith' to describe this trust.

A small child trusts instinctively. Tragically, many quickly learn that those who they should trust cannot be trusted. How do they cope? Gradually, over time a mechanism is developed that protects their young hearts from the hurt of repeated disappointment. Church can be the place where we are safe enough to learn to trust again.

For some, particularly painful experiences can produce a determination to not risk being hurt. There comes a point in the process of learning and moving forward when the decision to trust again has to be taken. If we don't trust we shrink emotionally.



We can trust each other because ultimately our trust is in God. If our attitudes are submitted to Christ as the Head of his church, then he will always guide us into an ever-increasing oneness. As a result of the process of becoming one so we mature. In situations where trust has broken down, where there is an understanding of commitment it is possible to go in a spirit of openness and deal with the causes of that breakdown. For trust to exist and grow there has to be:

Openness

If you are a parent or work with children you will know what it is like to try and talk to a child who won't look at you! You won't get anywhere until they do!

As adults, we have developed sophisticated means of not hearing or facing up to what we don't want to look at. If we are going to become whole we will have to be open about what goes on inside. We will have to stop using our extrovert to prevent access to the introvert.



Where there is not openness, pressures build up within and usually come out in ways that are less than helpful! An active part of openness is:

Honesty

It is so easy to rationalise, excuse, duck or weave. Sometimes we will say something that seems to come from nowhere but often what we have unwittingly expressed is actually what we feel! We need to be honest enough to face what we do feel and then begin to process it. That is integrity.



Being honest means we are transparent. Honesty doesn't deal in hints and partial truth. If we are hurting or angry, let's be honest rather than pretending that all is well.

Living in unreality is emotionally unhealthy. Wrong attitudes develop in the emotional gaps that form within our psyche. If we are honest enough to face reality in every aspect of our

lives, those attitudes are squeezed out.

Life can be tough and there are many harsh realities in this world. If we cultivate honesty we will be better equipped to face reality. It is all too easy to use our Christianity as an escape from what is unpleasant in life, whereas if we really understand what it means to follow Jesus we will find ourselves secure enough to face and deal with the tough issues of life. It is only as we face reality that we are forced to mature and grow.

Vision

We need a clear, God-given vision for our own lives – and for those we care about. This vision will arise from an understanding of who the other person is and from a sense of what God has for him or her. All the above qualities are brought to bear to bring about this vision and will result in that person being affirmed and rising to their potential. If we pursue these six principles amongst people who know and love us then we will enjoy the richness of truly satisfying relationships.

