

Message Series:
GROWING ROOTS...
AS WE LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

October 23, 2011
RELATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Matthew 22:36
Speaker: Ken Davis

1. Question: Does anyone know why a tree has **roots**? To **feed** it, **grow** it, and **keep it from blowing down!** If you've ever tried to grow anything—you know that things do **not** grow well without roots!

-We have mature trees in our back yard—which is wonderful! Several years ago when Lori and I put an addition on our house, we noticed that the giant hole for the basement had to cut through the roots of a big cherry tree that was 15 feet away. We didn't think it was a big deal—I mean, it still had plenty of roots! We thought that until it died a year later—and we had to have it removed in several big pieces.

-There are some things you **want** to kill—like weeds! Unless you rip out the roots—they grow back. The root structure of any plant gives it stability and the water and nutrients it needs to grow.

-Roots are actually quite cool. Without even thinking about it—they are automatically wired to search for water--and keep spreading, heaving sidewalks, splitting foundations, curling around rocks--until they find it. And when the wind blows, the roots instinctively know to spread out and grow deeper. Roots are **not** pretty; they're gnarly, dirty unattractive things—but you couldn't have an apple without them!

- a. When we started the church almost 8 years ago and were looking for a name—and the imagery of an **Olive Branch** caught our imagination. It's mentioned in the story of Noah—and was the sign after a disaster that life on this planet would once again thrive. Now it's kind of universal symbol of reconciliation.

-So we tried to make all the imagery fit: Kid's Branch. Branch Out. The Grove. The youth names were symbolic as well; **Ignite, Playing With Fire**—you know, things that **burn** olive branches and olive oil! When it came to our small groups—we thought, **Roots!** It's a perfect name. Below the sight line and not immediately visible—and yet **critical** for nourishment and stability. It was the perfect imagery!

- b. What was **not** perfect, however, was how we created them and helped people to find the community—the nourishment and stability—they needed. We've realized this at the leadership level—and our plan in this next year is to embed the value of **Roots** right into our DNA. So this morning, I'm starting a series of messages called **Growing Roots**.

-There's a double meaning to this; first, we want to help everyone here develop a **root** structure that helps us flourish the way God intended—and support what

He grows through our lives. Secondly, we want **everyone** to have a chance to experience the depth of community and connection Jesus brings to His people **wherever two or three are gathered**.

2. There's one theme you will hopefully pick up that runs through this entire series. God did **not** create humans because he was lonely and needed to make some friends. God **is** a community--Father, Son and Spirit—loving, cooperating, nurturing, supporting **one another** for all eternity. We are created in **His Image**—to live in community with each other. That's why the Bible can say that God is **love!** That's why Jesus would say that to **love God** and **love others** fulfills what God always intended for our lives.

-Please understand—this community isn't just a nice thing to have when life is tough; community is our identity and our destiny. Sin **always** isolates—God **always** connects. For this to happen—for us to experience our destiny—learning how to **love God and others** and **experience the love of God and others** is the **hallmark** of everything Jesus taught.

-We live in a world **jammed** with relational tools: cellphones, iPhones, email, Facebook, Twitter, and dating websites. So, **How are we doing?** Well the tools are **awesome!** How about the actual **relationships?** Are people giving and receiving more love, intimacy and connectedness than ever? Not from what I see.

-Here's the deal: A relational tool is **only as good** as the **relational intelligence behind it**. If someone is relationally inept—the actually **tools** might just do more damage. If we're going to find our identity in—and experience the community we were created for—I honestly think we should start with the most relationally brilliant person who ever lived—Jesus.

-Here's the truth about relationships: They're **messy!** They're difficult to build and maintain—and always have been! People are not easy to love! They hurt our feelings, make rude gestures at us, throw trash on our lawn, frustrate us. And **yet...they also** make us laugh till we ache, fill our hearts with warmth and joy, and create some of the most profoundly meaningful, deep experiences of our lives.

- a. We enter life quite unprepared for the frustrations of relationships. Who tells you in kindergarten that the kids in your class may one day vote you off the island? Which teacher or professor ever tells you that in the real world, it's not your brilliant IQ, your GPA, or your stunning list of extra curricular activities that will fill your heart and make you successful--it's your ability to relate to others, to find and make peace, and to live with grace and sensitivity?
- b. In a world that has always focused on performance, achievement and money—Jesus taught the astounding truth that people are more important than **anything!** It's clear from all of Jesus' teaching that this relational part of our life is not only important to us, it's important to God. When you understand that life gets measured by how well we love God and love others—it makes **sense** why the Bible is jammed full of relational wisdom—and why the Spirit's work in our hearts is all about helping us to **love**.

3. Let me narrow things down a little bit more. The Bible tells us that Jesus personified what it was like to live a life that is full of both **truth and grace**. So, this morning I want to take a closer look at what He had to say—specifically, about how to **build** relationships, **treasure** them, and **keep them from blowing up**. If you and I can learn from Him—then I think we have a good chance of leaving a great legacy on this planet and leading a truly satisfying and meaningful life.

-The first thing I need to tell you is that Jesus never used the words, **Relational Intelligence**. But He did make it clear that the world **love**—a key relational word--pretty much summed up everything God expected of us. **Love** is the bottom line in relational intelligence. Now, there are a lot of people I'm indebted to for their research in this area--Daniel Goleman, Howard Book, John Ortberg. But I **do** know where they got all their raw material; it's from the biblical record of who Jesus was, what He said, the community He created, and how He treated others.

- a. Let me read Jesus' general summary of everything God expects of you and me:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40 NIV)

-You could think of what Jesus said in the shape of a cross. There is definitely a **vertical** part to this; love God with heart, soul, and mind. The horizontal piece that **completes the cross** is? Love your neighbor as yourself. If anyone ever asks you, "What does the Bible say?" Tell them, **Love God completely...and love others sacrificially.**

- b. What's fascinating in our world is that, from a research standpoint, people who don't believe what the Bible says are now coming to understand that not only is our relational world extremely important to God, it affects everything WE do. Edward Hallwell is a senior lecturer at Harvard Medical School. In a recent book he says that, for most people, the two most powerful experiences in life are **achieving** and **connecting**. He says:

"Most of what grabs our attention, commands our energy, compels our help, falls in these two categories. Connecting has to do with our relational world--things like falling in love, forming a deep friendship, hearing words of affection and affirmation from a parent or a child--that's connecting. Achieving has to do with the world of our accomplishments--winning a contest, pursuing a successful career, realizing a difficult goal."

-Hallwell goes on to say that our culture is **obsessed** with achieving. But, compared to other societies in other eras of history, we are increasingly

bankrupt and impoverished when it comes to connecting in relationships.

-I've worked with people for over 30 years. I have **never** known anyone who failed at relationships--who was isolated, lonely and unconnected--who has lived a meaningful, joy-filled life--have you? The other side to this is that I have never met a single person who succeeded at relationships, had great friends, gave themselves to their family, and became a master at giving and receiving love from God and others--who had a bad life--have you? According to Jesus--relationships are not **accessories** to life, they really **are** life—and **life-giving!**

- c. The field of scientific research is finally catching up to what the Bible has said all along. A group of social scientists from Harvard studied the relational worlds of 7000 people for a 9 year period. They found that relationally isolated people were **three times** more likely to die than people who had strong friendships.

-In fact, even people who had poor health habits like smoking and obesity--but had strong relationships lived significantly longer than people who had great health habits--but were isolated. That proves, friends, that eating my fudge and butter tarts with friends is more healthy than eating broccoli alone!

- d. We crave community--companionship—because we were designed by God Himself, made in His image. If you miss this, you will miss out on the reason God made you no matter how much you accumulate, how high you climb, or how many magazines you get written up in.

4. As I studied the Bible from a relational perspective, I was blown away. Not only is the story of Jesus a story of relationships, his best-known message, the Sermon on the Mount, is almost all about relationships.

-The Bible gives a profound explanation in its opening pages why that is so. Most of you are familiar with the Genesis account of Creation. There's a certain rhythm to this story. God creates--then evaluates. Universe and stars? **Good!** Sky and air? **Good!** Water and dirt? **Good.** Trees, veggies? **Good.** Fish and whales? **Good.** Snakes and bugs...? **Uhhhh—good!** Man? And the cadence is broken. He says, "**Not good.**" The question is--why? He's alone. Aloneness is not **good**—it is not **healthy**—it is not God's **intention** for humans. That is a profound statement about human relationships.

-And this statement that it was **not good** for man to be alone was made **before** the relationship Adam had with Him was broken by the Fall! Apparently, this relational space exists in us, and nothing else can fill it except other people.

- a. Jesus' teaching on living in relational wholeness is both deep and profound. I can't cover it all this morning—but He deals with how to build relationships, how to restore relationships—how to forgive people when they break your heart. He talks about dealing with impulses that destroy and dehumanize others—like anger, hatred and lust. He talks about keeping promises, about refusing to retaliate when people hurt you—and relational stupidity--judging, complaining and criticizing.

- b. What's fascinating is that Jesus even raises the issue of relational intelligence in how we connect with God. He says, "It's not magic; it's not a show you put on to impress Him; it's not learning how to trick him into doing what you want, or pulling a tantrum until He picks up the phone!" Jesus said, "No! It's building a relationship of love and trust with the best Dad you've ever had."

-Jesus practiced what He preached. You see the truth He taught woven through His entire relational world. Jesus was close friends with both men and women. He had an intimate relationship of love with His Father—and He knew how to love and build relationships with the most unlikely of people. People like you and me.

5. What I would like to do in the rest of our time together this morning is to lay the foundation for the rest of this series on ***Growing Roots***. More specifically—I want to talk about learning to love others as we love ourselves; or...living with **relational intelligence**.

-This book, ***Emotional Intelligence***, by Daniel Goleman, was published in 1995. Since then, it has become a best-seller—and made a ***profound*** impact on our culture. Goleman's research starts with a study of Harvard graduates. The surprise was that when they were tracked into middle age, it became clear that how well they did was not based on their IQ—but ***more*** on their emotional intelligence.

-In his book, Goleman says that:

1) **Relationally intelligent people know how to manage their emotions**

- and keep them from swamping their lives and sabotaging relationships. Remember what Jesus said about dealing with worry? About jealousy, judging, anger, and retaliation?

2) **Relationally intelligent people have the ability to connect with other people with warmth, authenticity and compassion.**

How many of you think that describes Jesus and what He taught—2000 years before this book came out?

3) **Relationally intelligent people can read others!**

They understand what people may never say out loud—but scream at you with their body language. Jesus was an ***expert*** at this! Remember his words, "Don't throw your pearls to pigs!" In other words, ***discern*** whether people are interested in what you say before you continue to talk!

4) **Relationally intelligent people know how to navigate difficult relational situations with skill.**

They know how to tell the truth without blowing up relationships. Jesus said, "Be wise as serpents—but harmless as doves!"

-You have a **relational world!** Treating others as **you** would want to be treated means making wise decisions in managing that world—and making it better, not worse.

a. Anyone remember the movie **Forrest Gump**? The story is a contrast between relational intelligence and IQ. Forrest Gump, played by Tom Hanks, goes through life--seemingly oblivious to the fact that he's the brunt of every joke. There's one scene where he is rejected by the one woman he's loved and been loyal to ever since childhood—and he says, "I may not be very smart, but **I know what love is.**" And **that's** the question every person who wants to follow Jesus has to answer: **Do you know what love is? Really?**

b. I found a quiz on relational intelligence—are you interested in me giving it? I'll give you one situation—and then 3 options in how to respond to it. Okay?
-You're describing your childhood in minute detail to someone you've just met. His eyes are kind of glazing over, he's turned sideways, and is inching away from you. What do you do in this situation?

- #1. You grab him by the arm so he can't get away until you're finished
- #2. You get real close to his face. People always listen if you get so close they can smell your breath.
- #3. You look for another listener who looks a little more vulnerable--you know, easier to trap.

c. How many of you think people can improve their IQ? They can't. But the **good** news is that we **can** grow in learning how to live out our destiny in community with others—in a rich context where we give love and receive it; where we accept others and are accepted; where we serve others—and are served. I'll tell you what is **really** cool; not only does Jesus talk at length about the relationships—loving others as we love ourselves—the Holy Spirit, when He is permitted to enter and rearrange our interiors, gives us power.

-Guess what He does in us? He grows **fruit!** Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness—and **self-control**—the qualities build Jesus' character into our lives. But we have to COOPERATE.

-Please understand—all truth is **God's** truth—but the books on the market are mostly about relational technique to make you a successful person. The relational wisdom Jesus gives is **not** about personal success; it's about **seeing and valuing people as fellow image bearers!** You and I are called to love, accept, help and serve people because **that's what God does**—not for our own personal enrichment! **Big** difference! I would strongly urge you to become acquainted with the Bible. It gives case studies of just about every kind of relationship you can imagine—but **you** have to do the work of massaging its message into your heart.

6. In the final minutes we have together today, I want to get very practical and describe three critical decisions you and I are going to have to make if we are going to find the relational wholeness and connectedness God wants for our lives. Again, I've

borrowed these thoughts from others.

The first decision is this:

Relationally intelligent people decide that they will invest large chunks of time into building relationships.

That whatever else they may have going on, that no matter how busy life gets--relationships will get the time and priority that is necessary.

- a. Remember what I said earlier on how Jesus summarized what God expects of us? He says, "A life that **flourishes**—can be summarized with two loves. **Love God!** Love Him with all your passion, all your energy, all your intelligence--with everything. And **love others**--the people around you--as much as you love yourself." Now if JESUS said that this summarizes everything God expects, it makes sense that we should take the time to DO it.

-Has anyone here found a better way to build strong relationships with others--other than investing time? Just being together? Lovers do this intuitively.

- b. Everyone wants to be connected, to find deep, loving, supportive relationships--but we're too doggone busy to actually do it. And we even raise our kids like that--to achieve, rather than connect. Here's the deal, friends. The first step toward relational intelligence is knowing that you **can't microwave friendships** or intimacy in your marriage. Know why? Because you can't listen--rejoice in other's victories—or mourn with those who mourn--in a hurry.

- c. And relationally intelligent people know that it will take more than time to build relationships--it will take grace and patience. Know why? Because the only kind of person you will ever connect with on this planet is a broken, imperfect one.

-One author on this subject describes seeing a magazine in a super-market checkout line with a title that read, **Totally normal women who stalk their Ex-boyfriends**. The strange part of that phrase is **totally normal women**. There is no such thing as a totally normal woman or man. Relationally intelligent people understand that.

-Maybe we just need to affirm a great theological truth. **Everybody's weird**. Just look at the person next to you, nod your head knowingly and say to them, **Everybody's weird!** Go ahead.

- d. This past week has been **crazy!** So, I finished a funeral—then decided that I would go and pick up replacement bulbs for me office—you know, in the 5 minutes I had before I was to be there. So, I run over to Home Depot—and it looks like I'm going to make it. But—I backed out in a hurry—and hit another car that was backing out. See, when we're in a hurry—we're don't build relationships with others—we **bump into them!** You **cannot** stuff community--building significant relationships with others into the cracks of an overburdened,

crammed, over-committed life. You have to get intentional! Smart people do that.

-So, you plan for everything else--plan to be with friends--where the only agenda is to be together. **Relationally intelligent people do that.** Will you?

7. There is a second decision relationally intelligent people make. This one's more difficult, I think. They

Relationally intelligent people learn to overcome the fear of rejection--the fear of being hurt.

The fear of rejection is the single biggest barrier in my life—and probably yours--to developing deep, loving relationships. We've all felt it. "What if I invite someone over, and they don't come? What if people get to really know me and think I'm too weird? What if my clothes, my car, my job isn't good enough?" In these past few years, we've made some directional decisions as a church—and I've had a few close friends pretty much walk out of my life. **Man** does that hurt!

- a. We don't get too hung up about rejection in grades 1 and 2. Remember sending and receiving notes in huge, block letters: **Do you like me? Will you be my friend?** But one day we get too sophisticated to say, "Do you like me?" To tell people in a group—or even in our family--that we need—and **long for--**their love and acceptance and help.

-It's a whole lot easier to say, "I'm way too busy to do that." To avoid people's eyes when we walk, drive home, sunglasses on, stereo blasting--hit the Garage Door opener, order in Swiss Chalet--and watch re-runs of **Friends**—alone.

- b. You might be one of those bungee-jumping, sky-diving, rock-climbing, bug-eating, stock-market-playing gung-ho people whose pride won't let you admit you're scared of **anything!** You have no fear—you're willing to risk your bones, teeth and savings to impress all the onlookers, but, truth is, when your heart is on the line, you're scared!

- c. Relationally intelligent people **get it!** That you have to **take risks** if you want a relationally rich life. There is no safe easy way. And if you open your heart, you will get hurt. Not, **you might get hurt; you will!**

-Author, John Ortberg, says that if you're looking for pain-free, risk-free soul-satisfying friendships that you can squeeze into your spare time, you've joined the wrong species. Problem is, if you don't risk, you'll never know love. The safe little insulated container that protects your heart is called...a **coffin**—because your soul will shrivel, suffocate and die. Jesus' command wasn't to go look for someone to love you—it was **love others as you love yourself.** First person action verb!

-Relationally intelligent people face the fear of rejection head on and risk anyway; first, because that's what Jesus said to do. Second because that's not

just the way to **give** love; that's the way to **find** love! What will you do?

8. That feeds into the third decision relationally intelligent people make is to

Relationally intelligent people take the initiative to develop relationships.

They say "If this is going to happen, I'm going to have to pursue it."

-In this little church I led in the mountains of Pennsylvania, there was a woman who had been in the church most of her life—and yet she once told me, **This church is the most unfriendly church I've ever seen.** But I had watched her. She came in late, sat in the back with her arms folded, with a face that'd scare off a pit bull. And when things were over, Poof! She did her David Copperfield imitation and disappeared.

- a. She actually reflects a sentiment most of us have at least **thought** that goes like this. "How come I have to always be the one to pick up the phone and make the call? Why do I always have to be the one to make the first move toward somebody and invite them over? I'm tired of that. Let them call **me** first!"

-Question. Can anyone relate to that? Everybody can! It's universal. People who do what Jesus did—people who show relation aptitude know that if you want to be connected—**you** have to take initiative—and not wait for others to make the first move.

- b. Think about it; who **wouldn't** like to identify with a community like Jesus described where there's intimacy--people who love you and walk with you when life falls apart; people you can call anytime, people who love you just as you are--warts and all. Never borrow money, never call you too late or too early, ask you to do things you really like to do—and all you have to do is sit back and **receive!**

-But the truth is, intimacy, close friendship, people you can always count on--has a price-tag. Love isn't something I **take**. I have to be willing to **offer** commitment, give up **my** time, honor someone's secrets when I'd rather not--**inconvenience** myself to be there for someone. Jesus calls us to love others like we love ourselves—not because it's easy, but because it's **right**—and leads to **really living!** .

-Here's the thing--you **can't** make deep relationships happen. But you **can** create the soil where they grow by investing time, facing your fears—and taking the initiative. And our plan is to help **everyone who wants** to live in community and flourish in this area—by growing roots. By being involved with others in a **cause** where the community and connectedness the Spirit promises at least has a chance to grow.

- d. The most important thing you need to know this morning is it's worth it! That's what you were created for—and when you chose to follow Jesus, that's what you signed up for! That is what will fill up your heart more than any accomplishment or achievement or success that may come your way. See,

because this relational world outlives the grave—and carries over into eternity. Relationships last when you've lost your ability to achieve great things or amaze your friends.

-Here's the question: will you do it? Will you take the time; will you risk rejection; will you take the initiative—and will you learn how to grow this critical area of life?

9. In closing—I would like for you to consider some decisions you may have been postponing. And the first one is your relationship with the God of the Universe—who made you. Jesus went to the cross so that we could be reconciled with God—forgiven—and walk with Him through life. His arms are open—right this minute. All the obstacles have been removed. He risks rejection—and **waits...**for you! Will you come?

-And what about your other relationships? Relationally intelligent people **get it**—that life is fragile—and the door on relationships won't stay open forever. May I suggest some relationally intelligent options for you?

*Maybe you need to take some intentional steps—toward someone in your family—or toward a friend--take things to a whole new level.

*It could be that you need to stop fighting with someone in your life. Just humble your pride, forgive--and offer peace.

*And if you've never done this, why not get down on your knees and ask God, Do You like me? Will You be my Friend?

*Whatever you do, remember how short life is. Remember what life is really about. It's all about love.