

Relationship Snowball

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[0 : 00] So this morning, you're going to be hearing from somebody else. Joe Baumgardner is one of the elders here at Grace Bible Church. And I asked him if he would be up for sharing a couple months ago.

And he said, sure. And I'm excited to hear what he has to say. He's an important part of this church and the leadership of this church. And I'm excited to hear what he's got to share with us.

Well, good morning. You know, I'm not super skilled at this. So you guys are going to have to be gracious with me, okay? So I don't know if you looked in the bulletin there.

I think it says the title as a relationship snowball. And you might be thinking, what in the world is that? I'm going to set this down here. Nathan's definitely got like a very slim setup up here.

I think I need like a coffee cup holder and some stuff. So the relationship snowball. What I want to talk to you about this morning is just relationships, really, their impact on our lives.

[1 : 09] And basically use that as a way to share some of my testimony with you about how it's affected my own life and some scripture references, too, along the way.

So the snowball thing. You've probably heard of a debt snowball, right? And it's kind of this thing about compounding, right? And so here's, you've probably heard of compound interest.

Albert Einstein once said that compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. And that he who understands it earns it. And he who doesn't pays it.

Right? That is, it's clever, but it's true if you stop and think about it, right? Right? It's really true. And we're talking in the world of money here. Because I want to kind of do an analogy a little bit.

Benjamin Franklin explained it well when he said that money makes money. And the money that money makes, it makes money. Okay? And so you can see that.

[2 : 08] And so an example would be, on the investing side, is that \$10,000 deposited once, put in an account that, suppose it earns 10% interest, okay?

Over the course of 40 years, turns into \$442,000. Okay? Now, that is a gain or a creation of \$442,000, right?

Just from a \$10,000 expenditure, we'll say, right? If you could come up with that. Now, you know, there's lots of things that get into investing and stuff. But this isn't about investing.

But I want to, I want to try to draw a connection between how relationships work in our lives the way compound interest does on money, okay?

And so that's where I'm going with this. I've been listening to some audio books lately for my business. And one of the guys in there, it was, he talks about, you know, how you have to become the person that you need to be to run their business a certain way.

[3 : 15] And he said, you know, if you want to know what your future is, he had this little test where you look at the six people who are closest to you and what kind of people they are, right? You know, it's kind of harsh. He said, look at those six people.

He says, get a good look. He said, that's your future, right? And I thought, well, what's he pointing to? He's pointing to the power of relationships, right? And who we surround ourselves with has an influence on the road that we ultimately take.

I had a job interview once. It was clear back when I was like 18. And I was sitting at a job interview, and they were probably asking me about my friends and things like that. And I don't remember really the context of it completely, but the guy made this statement.

And he was an older fellow. He was a warehouse manager. He said, when you look around in your group of friends, and he said, if you find that you're the smartest one, then it's time to get new friends. And I thought, man, that's like, that's harsh, right?

And I didn't really appreciate that, but, you know, to a two degree. But it's always rolled around in my head. And what his point was is that, again, who you are with, right, and who you're around and your relationships have influence over your life, okay?

[4 : 26] And it's pretty powerful. Proverbs makes for easy preaching. That's why I'm going to quote Proverbs a few times here, okay, guys?

Proverbs 13.20 says, He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed, right? Now, does that sound pretty impactful, right?

As we think about the importance of our relationships. Proverbs 12.26, And Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15.33, Do not be deceived.

Evil company corrupts good habits. And so we can see even in Scripture there is this connection with who we're around and the paths that we end up taking. And as we'll see later, there's more implications than just that.

I don't want you to think here as I'm going through here, I'm talking about cutting people out of your life. We're not talking about that at all. We're just talking about, think about relationships. Think about our relationships and what we can do with them.

[5 : 37] And so the verses, I think I've already probably said it, they point to the fact that relationships do indeed influence our lives and lead us down certain pathways. There's a popular poem that I'm going to read here real quick.

You've probably heard of it. It keeps coming up in these audiobooks that I've been listening to. But Robert Frost has a pretty popular poem titled, The Road Not Taken.

And when I listen to it, I feel like it can connect with this life pathways things and how relationships can work. But I'll just go ahead and read the poem here by Robert Frost.

And he says, So he's standing at a fork in the road.

And having perhaps a better claim, because it was grassy and wanted wear, though as for that, the passing there had worn them really about the same.

[6 : 46] And both that morning equally lay in the leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first one for another day. So the first path. Yet knowing how way leads to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh, somewhere ages and ages hence. Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.

Way leads to way. Okay, so as he looked at those two pathways, he knew, if I go down one, one thing leads to another. One way and one decision in our life leads to another.

I probably am never going to make it back to try that other path or to go down it, right? And that's true with relationships. Depending on the people that we run with and stuff like that, it affects our life.

So let me flip over here. So I want to, a little bit of testimony time.

[7 : 57] I want to talk about a family that I'll just maybe equate them to, if you want to try to think about my little money analogy, the \$10,000 relationship, okay, that I feel like impacted and influenced our family.

And when I say, really my family growing up and how it's compounded and impacted my family now. And so there is a family that my parents met when they were new Christians.

They were just married and starting out. And I would say that they were, you know, they made all the difference growing up. Because they showed my parents a different way.

They homeschooled their kids. I'm just going to go ahead and read through what I wrote here.

They've homeschooled their kids. They had family dynamics that were rare. And I can say to this day, in my mind, they're still just rare.

My parents noticed, to say the least, and wanted the same for their own family. My parents developed a relationship with Mike and Susie. And as early as I can remember, we used to look forward to annual visits from them as they traveled to book events each year.

[9 : 03] Us kids, and we did, we always marveled at how well the kids of this family got along with each other. And we looked up to them so much. They were a big family. I think, from what I can remember, I think they had seven or eight kids, you know, at the beginning of my memory.

So several of them were older. I think they ended up with nine. And there was like three of us at the time. And several of them were older than us. And there was an authentic warmth that we just couldn't miss.

And two of my favorite memories as a kid was one when the older brother came to stay with us for six weeks. I think it was six weeks. I can't remember how long. But he wanted to learn how to farm, okay?

And so homeschoolers, homeschooling families, there's a lot of things that we kind of have in common. And one of the things is like an entrepreneurial independent spirit, okay? So I think they wanted that for Andy.

And so he came out and he stayed with us. And that was just something as a kid. And it was super influential on me. And so he stayed with us. And then I don't remember how long it was later.

[10:12] It might have been a year. You know, back when you're seven and eight, like a couple months feels like a decade. But we had gotten in a car accident. And my mom had a broken leg, and she was six months pregnant.

And so two of the girls ended up coming out to stay with us for several weeks. And they tried to come and stay right about the time when my sister was supposed to be born to help out. And, again, just a super impactful time because we, as little kids, we just idolized those older kids from that family.

And it just made a huge impact. They were always the role model and the example for us. And so when I think about that family, so, well, let's go.

Don't let me jump ahead here. When I think about that family, for one, there's just, even still, they're just an example for me now when I'm looking at my kids and stuff.

So I mentioned the homeschool thing. Where did I put it in here? I think I missed it. See, I told you you're going to have to bear with me.

[11:24] I don't know where it is in here. I'll have to find it in a minute. But one of the things I wanted to point out as far as how does this relationship work in a compounding effect, okay, on our life.

So my mom and dad were brand-new Christians, basically, when they met this family. And I don't know for sure, but I would imagine that they homeschooled us kids probably based upon seeing this family do things a different way.

And I don't want to alienate some people by, you know, putting too much emphasis on the homeschool thing. But it's just a big part of my upbringing. And it's affected my way in life in ways that probably I never thought that it would.

I don't even know. My parents totally understood the way that it would. But it has. And sort of like Robert Frost, I look back. It's one of those things that I'd point to and say it's really made all the difference for me.

It doesn't have to be, okay. But for me, it just has. And so a compounding effect from that relationship, my mom and dad end up having six kids, okay. All of us kids have had a lot of kids.

[12:29] And so my mom and dad have 26 grandkids, okay. And so there's 26 grandkids now. And guess what? All of them, at the moment at least, I don't know that we'll make it all, you know, with every single one through the whole process.

But so far they're all homeschooled, okay. All the ones that are old enough to be in school are homeschooled. That's a pretty big impact, right. And so whether or not that's something that you value or not, the reality is is that this family impacted my parents, impacted how they raised their kids.

And here now they've got six kids. There's six of us. There's 26 grandkids. It just goes, right. One thing leads to another. Way leads to way, as the poem says. And I think that's what the Proverbs even are talking about when it says that if you're with the wise, you will be wise.

But a companion of fools. There's a connection here. There's an influence. And that's kind of what I want to point out. And so, you know, when I think about that family, again, I oftentimes look at my kids and our family and how they're interacting, and I think, I don't think we're quite there yet, right. But that's just, and I just say that because it was such an impact, right, such an impact, and very thankful that God used them in our life. So I mentioned homeschooling, and like I said, I don't really want to alienate anybody by using it so much, but it just, it does impact, it is just the impact through my life there.

[14:05] Social interaction, right. So being homeschooled. Social interaction is supposed to be a biggie, right. And that's the first thing we always heard about being homeschooled.

Well, how are you going to interact with people and all the rest. And, you know, sometimes I still hear that today, though a lot of times today things have changed a lot, right. Back then, I mean, in the early 90s, they look at you really weird, or late 80s, actually.

They look at you really weird and say, what are you doing? Why? And so social interaction. Just another, I would say, again, trying to make examples of compounding effects here in relationships. Because I was not in public school. Again, I'm not saying you can't make it in public school. Don't misunderstand me. But because I wasn't in public school, my social well had to get filled somewhere else, right, just by nature.

And it was church for me. And it was our family and our family connections. And I just kind of reflected as I was putting this together the fact that I can kind of remember as a kid a lot of times, I felt like there were sometimes people were trying to make room for church in their life, right.

[15 : 21] Or make room for that whole area of their life, and maybe even Christianity as a whole. And as a kid, because there's a whole social structure at school.

And it's not all bad. I'm not saying that it is necessarily. But that's your world as a kid. I mean, that's where you are for the bulk of the time of your day. That's where your influences come from.

And they can be good. But they cannot be. But for me, I look back. The reality of it is, it really made me look to church for my relationships.

And I didn't have to make room for it. That's just naturally where I looked. And as I go through, I guess, as I think about my pathway through life, I have all of my significant relationships in life have been met by people right in my church.

Okay. And so, for example, the family that my parents met, they met them right here at Grace.

Okay. And that's kind of special.

[16 : 31] And if you kind of full circle back a little bit here, since I've been back, there's a couple families that kind of showed up. And they're the most significant relationships as far as maybe families and influence on us.

And we met them right here, too. Right? Now, I've been involved with a few different churches over the course of my life. And, you know, I have relationships that impact the profession that I'm in.

Right? One of my best friends is doing the work that I do now. And he did it first. And since he's my best friend, he tells me a lot of things about his business. If he wasn't my best friend, he probably wouldn't tell me things about his business.

Right? And little by little, that got me interested in the business. And so we tend to do it together a little bit. Again, it came from the church environment.

And so many relationships along that way that I oftentimes wonder, if I was trying to make room for it, would I have developed those relationships?

[17 : 33] Right? And just something to think about. Let's see. Let me get back to my notes here. So when I think about, and again, I really want to be sensitive.

But at the same time, this is sort of my testimony. So I get a pass, I think. Right? Okay. Romans 12.2. It says, Do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I memorized that verse as a kid, actually, at church. I think it was the NIV version. And I think the NIV version says, Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world.

So the patterns is always stuck in my head. But, you know, when I think about the social structures and social dynamics that we have for our children and for our young, shouldn't we build and model social structures based upon Scripture?

To hold our, for our children. And it's just something to think about. And, you know, we don't always have all the options. So some people can't homeschool. That's okay. But it's an example of just being intentional, right, about what kind of social structures our kids are in.

[18 : 51] And, you know, the other thing along that is that if we think about the last generation or two, I feel like we've kind of lost, the church has sort of lost the youth.

I think everybody kind of somewhat agrees with that. And I think we have to ask ourselves why. And it isn't one simple answer. But I think there's a piece of this that does.

When you look at Proverbs and you look at who you're with, influences your way. Okay? And that's one of the benefits, I'll just say, of homeschooling or whatever, is that you have control over the influence of your children.

Okay? And little by little, you're preparing them to go out into the world. But in a lot of ways, kids, you know, when they're young, they get exposed to a lot of things and a lot of people that they're not ready for at the right age.

You know? And you don't have any control over that if you don't have control over that, right? And that's just kind of the reality of it. So anyway, so there's that. All right.

[20 : 08] So one more I'm going to try again here just from the kind of this snowball rolling idea of a relationship. So I found myself this year at family camp, a homeschool family camp, okay, out in Iowa.

And again, what's it from? It's from one of these relationships. And I wouldn't have been out there any other way. We're not going to drive that far, you know, unless there's somebody there that I know.

But as I'd mentioned, that these people, those of us who have chose to homeschool our kids, we've got a lot of things in common. And I didn't realize this about the family camp. The reason I'm going out there is just to make memories with our kids, to do fun things.

And I think one of the things I meant to mention here, I'm just kind of going off of my notes here. But one of the things a lot of homeschoolers, not all, but some have in common, is the approach to raising your family, okay?

And there's a term called family discipleship. And one of the elements of that is just doing things together as a family, more so than being split up and sent around, okay?

[21 : 13] Not that you can't be split up and go around once in a while, but as much as we can, we try to do things as a family. So maybe it's family worship, but family discipleship, something to tuck away. So that's part of the reason for going out to family camp.

That's why I'm going, going out to have some memories, do some fun things. We've got relationships out there, all that. But, well, I got out there, and of course, this year for me with my business, I've been thinking about what do I want to do?

Do I want to grow? Do I not want to grow? How am I going to do it? And that's rolling around. So I get out to the family camp this year, this homeschool family camp, and find out.

And I didn't realize, I've been there before, I didn't realize it, but just about all of them happen to be, like, self-employed, right? Business owners. I didn't realize that. And so early on in the week, one of the guys, one of the dads did a seminar.

He has a pretty good-sized business about how to grow your business and how you have to think and all the different things related to that. And so here I am just going out there for something else, and yet this kind of came in alongside and had a lot of opportunity to talk to people about those things.

[22 : 22] And it's just kind of one of those things, again, where as you're going down the pathway, it's amazing how one thing leads to another thing. And there isn't anybody I'd rather get business advice from than maybe a godly man who has the same family values as I do and all of that.

And so that was the family camp connection. And just kind of another example. I don't know how to really explain how big of a deal that was because it's kind of been an all-summer thing.

Those guys, they gave me books to read. One guy I talked to, as I was talking to him, he said, this is where you are. You're stuck right here. This is what you need. And I thought, this is incredible. And the thought occurred to me, I thought, you know, if I didn't homeschool, I never would have been around any of these guys, right?

Now, maybe God would have met that need some other way, right? That's totally possible. I don't know. But there's just some times when I look back over my life, and we were thinking about this relationship thing.

If it hadn't been from the beginning that led to one thing, that led to the next thing, where would I be? And I don't know. And I think that's just the main purpose of the relationship thing here is just to think how powerful they are and how influential they are over your life.

[23 : 39] And it's one of those things where a lot of times I think you can look back, and you realize where you've been kind of led along through the influence of your closest friends and the people that you've been around.

And so I don't know. I don't know if you think about that. I don't know if I did a good enough job trying to highlight the value of relationships.

But you might say, well, you know, that's fine for you, Joe. That sounds like a neat story. It's interesting to hear that about you. I don't know. So I think there's a biblical call here. And I'm not talking about homeschooling anymore. But the biblical call for relationships. The Bible says that we are knit together in Christ, bearing each other's burdens and encouraging each other. Romans 12, 12, 5 says, So we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

[24 : 45] Ephesians 4, 15 and 16 kind of says the same thing from the whole body joined and knit together. Think of us being knit together like joints and ligaments.

I think that's more of the sound in Colossians. It talks about joints and ligaments. Joints and ligaments work pretty close together, right? And what he's talking about, he's not talking about the physical body. He's talking about people in the body of Christ.

And so it isn't just an observation, we'll say, about how relationships work. It's really about God's design, right?

It's God's design for us to work together and that we are, through each other, bearing each other's burdens, being involved in each other's lives, and meeting the relational needs that we have.

And I think that when you bring in the biblical design, it kind of creates more of like, there's some imperatives, right?

[25 : 44] There's sort of a mandate to develop relationships. It isn't really optional, I don't think. Some people are going to be more, you know, you have extroverts and introverts, and you have people who, you know, there are differences, and that's fine.

But we all need to value relationships and recognize how God uses them. If you want to, I feel like if I'm going to go up here and actually give a message, you should open your Bibles.

What do you think? Philippians 2, 25 through 30. If you'd like to take a look there, you can. I'm going to go ahead and read it. Kind of the point that I just want to make here is just listen for the dynamics that Paul has as he's writing to the Philippians here, and he's talking about Epaphroditus.

He says, Yet I consider it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.

Since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

[27 : 07] For indeed, he was sick almost unto death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but to me also, lest I should suffer sorrow upon sorrow. And I may be sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore I sent him to you more eagerly, that when you see him again, you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him, therefore, in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men high esteem.

So, the point here, think about just the dynamics that seem to be there between Paul, the Philippians, and Epaphroditus, right?

It sounds very personal, and if you look at most of Paul's writings, as he's addressing whoever he's writing to, you see this longing, this bond of connection to the people that he's writing with.

And I think the only reason I bring that up, that is a picture, I think, of how it's supposed to be with us in the body of Christ. It's not some impersonal thing.

[28 : 10] If you look at Paul, he was not impersonal at all with the people that he was writing to. And sometimes I think we have to ask myself, you know, am I making myself available enough to my church family that I would fit into this equation, like with Paul, Epaphroditus, and the Philippians, right?

And because there's blessing. There's blessing, and that's part of God's design. One of the other things that, this is another proverb that I threw in here, too, just with the whole subject of do we have relationships, do we focus on them, or do we not?

Proverbs 18.1 says, A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire, and he rages against all wise judgment. So it's just something to think about in terms of the relationship aspect and whether or not to do it, right?

So I have a couple things here just on how to find and develop relationships. It's not rocket science. But kind of like investing, okay? It's been said that with investing, I heard this recently, that you make money when you buy, not actually when you sell.

[29 : 33] Now, you see the gains when you sell, but you make money when you buy. And the point is that buying right leads to selling and making a profit, okay? With that in mind, relationships, I think, work sort of in that way.

You need to develop relationships with people, people that you need in your life, before you need them, okay? So things come up in life, hard times come, and you need people. And it's then that a lot of people, if they don't, you know, if they haven't availed themselves, right, of the opportunities for relationships, it can be kind of empty, right? And so that was just kind of a thing that I thought along those lines that parallels investing. And so it's being intentional, and it's thinking ahead there. Where to find relationships? As I've already kind of pointed out, church, I think, is a great place, right? And it's not the only place, but church is one of the best marketplaces for relationships, okay? [30 : 41] So it's important to be in a good church. It's where you can find the good church, the right churchgoer. And something else with relationships, and someone told me this, relationships are or can be eternal.

And we talk about money and investing. It all sounds cool, and people get sucked into it, and we always remember one thing. Can't take it with it. You can't take it with you when you go, right? But that's not actually true with relationships.

Relationships. And if you look out here, we all have connections with each other. I hope that we're all believers in the body of Christ. And whatever relationships that we build and develop now, those carry over into eternity.

And one of my close friends told me that a while back, and I thought, wow, you know, I've never thought about that. Never thought about that at all. All we ever think about down here is what we can't take with us, and yet relationships are something that you can take with you when you go. So, be a good friend. That's another way to develop relationships. Ephesians 4.32, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

[31 : 59] So, be a good friend. That really begins with, I mean, what does it take to be a good friend? Okay? Okay? It takes humility. I think it takes being in a place where we have in mind what Christ has forgiven us, right?

As we look at other people. And that really can enable you to be a good friend when you're looking to, when you're looking at people through the lens of grace.

Okay? That's kind of a biggie. I'm sure I won't do a good enough job kind of outlining that. But be a good friend. If you want one, be one. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Think about the fruits of the Spirit or the love chapter. Listen, if you are practicing those things, you can skip Dale Carnegie's book on how to win friends and influence people. Okay?

You can. Look for people who, well, look for people who are different. I was kind of like, I don't know, do you look for people who are different?

[33 : 05] You do. Definitely do not skip over people who are different. Okay? God looks on the heart and man looks on outward appearances. Now, we don't have God's eyes, and so don't be too hard on yourself.

Sometimes we have to work through the outward appearance things. But, you know, if I look back over my time at work or at church, the whole thing, how many relationships I've been able to develop with people who my first impression thought, I'm never going to have a connection with that person.

I don't see how I could. And yet, through the context of work or something like that, you are with this person for a while. And you have to do something. You have to accomplish something.

Maybe it's a team situation, someone on a sports team or whatever. However, I've just been surprised multiple times about the kind of relationship that I can have with someone who I would not initially have thought I would.

And so don't skip over people who seem different, maybe even a little bit odd. That is okay. A lot of times people who are different, you find out that, you know, they're kind of edging out their own pathway in life.

[34 : 16] They're not necessarily going with the flow. And that's a good thing. It can be a good thing. Look for a mentor. Mentors are very valuable.

Proverbs 27, 17 is iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. And the role of a mentor, again, if we start looking at the business world or investing, they all tell you you've got to get coaches.

And so important there. So the world knows that. We all know that. It's the same thing for us with, well, it's the same with any relationship.

But here in the body of Christ, look for a mentor. And, you know, remember what the guy told me at the interview, right? If you look around and find that you're the smartest guy in your group, you need to find some new friends.

You need to find some people who are out ahead of you, right? And this is another situation where you're going to have to be a little humble, right? Because pride would let you stay in that group as top dog, right?

[35 : 19] But that's not the best place for you, right? And so I've tried to be intentional about that, too. When I see someone who I believe is ahead of me, whether they're ahead of me in my profession or ahead of me in my spiritual walk, I've tried to grab on to their coattail, right?

And it can be humbling, right? Because maybe they're the same age as you. Maybe they're younger than you, and yet they're far more advanced spiritually, right? But find a mentor.

One of the things, for a little bit of strategy for you in developing your mentor relationships or looking for somebody, remember that they need friends, too.

Sometimes we look at people who are leaders, and we think they've got it all together. They don't have any needs. They don't have any doubts. They're good. And they're not.

They might be good, but they need friends, too. They need encouragement. And for a mentor or a leader, I think that it can be very encouraging.

[36 : 26] And I'm not really speaking of myself as a mentor or a leader. I'm thinking of someone who I've tried to, you know, claim them as my mentor and my leader. I've just tried to encourage them along their way as they lead and tell them when they've done great things or stuff that has impacted my life, right?

And that helps them because, you know, mentors and leaders, they have the same doubts that we all do about what they're doing. And is what they're doing impactful?

Is it not? Does it connect with people or does it not? And so, you know, and this is true any time, whether it's Nathan speaking or who, just let them know, right?

When you hear a good message, let them know. Or if someone, I don't know, you just see them doing a good job at something in the realm of relationships and leadership, let them know.

And that can be a way, too. So if you are around someone like this and you start to develop a relationship and they realize that you're a safe person, you know what can happen? They open up a little bit more to you.

[37 : 32] Any leader can tell you the four points and all that kind of stuff, right? They can all spell it out. But we always are under this assumption, I think, sometimes that, you know, well, I have these problems and that person, they don't have those problems, you know?

And if I ever get to this level of life, I'm not going to have those problems. And so it's very helpful if you get around a mentor, if you can get them to open up, you know, just like the real deal, what's going on, what are the real problems that they have in their lives, too?

And that's a great benefit for you, right? So just something to think about in the realm of finding a mentor and how to interact with them. And as far as them needing encouragement, Paul mentioned several times in his epistles how much encouragement he received and how much he longed for the encouragement of the people that he was writing to, to those churches, wherever it was.

Now, if you think about that for a minute, the apostle Paul had interaction with Christ himself, okay? That's what, you know, sometimes I think, man, if I could just speak to God, like if I could just hear his voice, if I could have that Damascus Road experience, what would I need, right?

Would I have any doubts? Would I have any weakness? And it's like, you know, but there's Paul. He's had that, right? He's been given revelation directly from God. And yet he still longs for and values encouragement from the people that he's working with, who clearly are on a lower, I mean, they're juniors, right?

[39 : 08] They just are. They're juniors in comparison to the apostle Paul. So something to think about along those notes of mentors and just what they need.

And all of that. All right. So we're getting close here. Potholes along the way or things that keep people from relationships.

It isn't all bliss, okay? So, you know, I probably painted the best picture I could about the family who influenced our family. If I had the time or the skill, I would tell you about each church that I've been a part of and just how much they mean to me.

Do you know the reality is is that there are painful things that happen along the way, okay? That is just the way it is. And so if you're looking at investing, you are never going to be any kind of investor and never lose money on an investment, okay?

Never going to happen. And that's one of the big things that keeps people from ever getting into that realm. Well, I don't want to lose my money. I don't want to lose my money. Well, you're going to lose some money, right? It's about what you're going to gain, though, and what you're going to learn along the way.

[40 : 24] Same thing is true in this realm of relationships in our lives, okay? And I think that a lot of people shy away from relationships because they're going to find out this about me and I'm going to get hurt or whatever it is.

And, you know, that might be true, right? It's possible. But we miss out on all of the blessing that comes from relationships if we take that approach, okay?

So fear is not supposed to be, you know, our source for guidance and direction, right? I mean, not this kind of fear anyway. And so that's just one of the things to think about.

And so I guess, you know, I put down here kind of each, really, if I chose to, okay?

And this is, I don't know. I find this to be true a lot. If I chose to, I could probably find a way to look at each church that I've been a part of and say, they are no good, right?

[41 : 35] This happened, that happened. And if that was the only thing that you heard about, you'd think, whoa, what kind of a place is that, right? Or what was wrong with those people? But you know something? It does not outweigh the good that came through it, right?

It doesn't. And one of the things, one of the reasons I chose to talk about relationships or try is that I just really have a heart for people connecting and encouraging each other.

And it's always kind of discouraging to me sometimes to look around and say, man, you know, so-and-so over there could sure benefit, right, from being connected with maybe so-and-so over here.

Or they would so benefit from being in this church body or a church body somewhere, right? And to some degree, some of the people that need to know the most about relationships and hear about the value proposition that's there are probably people who aren't even here, right?

And that's just, that's tough. But that's, I have that in my mind, and it's just always, it's sad to me sometimes or discouraging. I try to think of how to get people to think differently about relationships, to get over the fear of being hurt, get over the fear of the awkwardness, to see the value that's there for themselves, and to see how God works through people, right?

[43 : 04] We're knit together. You can't be knit together if you're disconnected, right? It doesn't, it doesn't work. And so we're working to be knit together now. In eternity, we're going to be knit together, right?

There will be no problem there. We can't talk about relationships without talking about the ultimate relationship. Now, that could be a whole message in and of itself, okay?

We'll go to Proverbs again, because like I said, it really makes for easy teaching. Proverbs 18.24, a man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. We can't talk about relationships without calling out the most important one of all, your relationship with Christ. There isn't any relationship, okay, that will compound, snowball effect, change your life more than your relationship with Christ, okay?

It's a pretty big deal when all of your sins and all of your transgressions have been taken off your back. It really frees you up.

[44 : 17] And with Christ, he works through you through the Holy Spirit, right? One of the things that I think about, how does our relationship with Christ affect our relationship together?

Obviously, there's the verses that show that we are all individual members, knit together as one. We think of that spiritually speaking, and we kind of think to ourselves, what does that really mean? One of the things about a relationship with Christ, and we talk about this a lot, like a personal relationship, and a lot of times we think, you know, what really is that like, or what could it be like, right?

The first thing that comes to my mind, that I've had to wrap my mind, or wrap myself around a little bit, is that we interact with Christ himself through faith, right? Faith is believing in something you can't necessarily see, right?

Or hear, it's not audible, that's the whole essence of faith. Now, there's plenty of evidence, but it's still faith. Now, we're talking about a relationship, and I think my understanding and conviction about this is that a lot of the real relational, like speaking back and forth to each other and stuff like that, that we need, God wants to fulfill that through each other, okay?

[45 : 42] That's what it means, being knit together, connected to the head, he supplies the need. We relate right now to Christ through faith. We can't see him, we can't speak to him, we don't, you know, you can pray.

And one of the questions that I kind of thought about with this is, you know, does God speak through others? And I don't want to say that, what I'm not saying by that is that, well, God told me to tell you, right?

No, I'm not talking about that, okay? But we have relational needs. We're created that way. God made us that way.

Okay, so what's his provision to have those needs met? And he's not doing it right, and he could if he wanted to. I mean, he could come down and just speak to each one of us all the time when we need to hear something, okay?

But I think that his provision for us is within the body of Christ, okay? And we go to scripture, we go to his word, and we know principles, but we need some more.

[46 : 44] We need to be able to talk to somebody. We need someone to bear. We've got these burdens, right? And I think that so part of our relationship with the Lord, it can suffer, I think, if you don't have any relationships with people in the body of Christ.

And so just something I wanted to call out there. Romans 12, 5 says, So we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

So, and you know, if you look at the Bible, it is nothing but a whole book of relationships pointing to Christ, pointing to his rescue plan.

Many of you have heard that before for life, but it's relationships. Every page that you open up, you're immediately reading about somebody interacting with somebody else and whether or not we're doing it in relation with God the way that we should, right?

And it is all about relationships. So, without relationships with others in the body of Christ, is it possible our relationship with the Lord suffers?

[48 : 00] And I do. I think that it does. And I think that there's, you know, the scriptural case can be made for that. If you just read through Paul's writings, you know, those are for us, right? Read through Paul's writings and see how interconnected those people are, that he is with the people he writes to and ministers to.

And how much he himself even gets encouragement from those. So, and again, I mean, the proverb, I just wasn't familiar with this proverb.

I don't know why it didn't stand out to me before. But a man who isolates himself, seeks his own desire, and it rages against all wise judgment. It doesn't make sense to not have relationships or press in with the body of Christ.

And so, thank you for hanging in there with me. I know I lost my way on that a few times. But I hope that in some way you just think about for your own life, what kind of, you know, what relationships do you have going on?

Maybe there's something you need to look for. Maybe there's something you need to kind of put some caution flags around. I don't know. But think about the body of Christ, how it works.

[49 : 13] And, you know, I did the best I could for my own life just to look back and to look at how those early relationships that got developed, how they've impacted me. And they've impacted, I could just talk to, I could connect the dots of my life to so many of the people that I've been around.

And in my case, fortunately, many of them have been from church. And so I just want to encourage you guys, young or old, okay?

So I thought about this too. You might say, well, this is kind of a message for maybe younger people, you know, starting out and where they want to go in life. All it takes to start a relationship snowball is someone sharing their story, okay?

And all of us in here have a story. We all do. And there's a lot of you that are further down the road who could really help a lot of us out in the beginning stages by just sharing your story.

You know, share some of your biggest, I don't know, the things you felt like made the difference, the things that you wish you could redo or whatever. And, again, that kind of takes humility.

[50 : 20] I have, you know, sometimes people tell me stuff like that. But it doesn't matter where you are, what stage of life you are. Think about relationships and what you can do and how you can impact somebody, how you can draw from someone else or how you can help someone else.

So I hope that that, I hope there was something in there for you guys today, okay? So that is all I have. We're dismissed unless, Nathan, you want to come up.

Wow. Thank you so much for that, Joe. You know, relationships, like you said, I mean, it's the fabric of life. That's what makes up a life is our relationships with others.

And so many times, you know, whether it's for a season or sometimes I've seen people their whole life, they don't give much thought to their relationships. They just kind of take, you know, what comes at them.

And if we can be intentional about our relationships, both the relationships that we have individually with others, the relationships in our family, especially as we're raising our kids, the relationships that we are fostering within our children and the networks that we're a part of, it's also very important.

[51 : 29] And I think I tell people, you know, the kinds of relationships that you have, especially as a man, but really anybody, is you should, you need to have peer relationships, people who are in the same place in life as you, people who are behind you, right, that you can help bring along, and then people who are ahead of you, people who can help bring you along, wise people who have learned things that you haven't yet, who have wisdom that you don't.

And so, but we need to be intentional about those things. Don't wait for somebody to come along who can help guide you along the way. Don't wait for somebody to come along and say, hey, I need some help.

Look, be on the lookout for those kinds of things and make sure that we are being intentional about our relationships. Let's close on a word of prayer. Father, thank you so much for the word that Joe shared today, the scriptures that you've given us, the wisdom that he offered.

And I pray that today you would work in our hearts, get our minds going about how we can continue to develop and foster good relationships in our lives, to be good stewards of the life that you've given us.

And we pray all these things in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.