

“The Relational Approach” – Matthew 9:9-11

If you think your family maybe dysfunctional, consider the marriage mayhem created when Bill Baker of London recently wed Edna Harvey, both 76 years old. She happened to be his granddaughter's husband's mother. That's where the confusion began, according to Baker's granddaughter, Lynn.

*"My mother-in-law is now my step-grandmother. My grandfather is now my stepfather-in-law. My mom is my sister-in-law and my brother is my nephew. But even crazier is that I'm now married to my uncle and my own children are my cousins."* (sermonillustrations.com)

A typical relationship is hard enough, isn't it? Your spouse, kids, in-laws, parents. They're all crazy people. I heard a lady say the other day that she once gave her husband the silent treatment for an entire week, at the end of which he declared, *"Hey, we're getting along pretty great lately, aren't we?"*

Why can't everybody be perfect just like us, right? Or maybe we should all just go live as hermits. Do you ever wish that after dealing with people sometimes? Dealing with people and having relationships with people is hard to do. Some people are better at it than others but I think almost everybody struggles with it sometimes. You probably have a job where you sometimes think, like I do, *"This would be a great job if it weren't for all these people."* Right?

The command that we are to "love our neighbor" is repeated lots of times throughout the Bible (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Along with the admonition to love God completely, this command was also repeated in three of the four Gospel accounts. The importance of loving God and loving others as much as we love ourselves is apparently very important. It is also very important to get the order correct...God first; everything else follows.

The apostle Paul said that we can be sure we are treating others the way God would have us treat them if we simply followed this commandment, *"For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9 ESV)*

But we all love our neighbors, right? I bet almost everybody here would say that they have love for their neighbor. Thankfully, it doesn't say that we have to like them but we are supposed to love them and I bet most of us do that. Hopefully, we at least don't act like we hate them. Or at least we aren't going to admit it here at church. But do we really love our neighbors and what is the definition of "love"? Is it the opposite of hate or is there something else? I think the question to be answered is, do you love someone enough to tell them the Good News of Jesus Christ? If you have relatives or lifelong friends to whom you've never told the Gospel, I have a hard time believing you really love them. I don't say you hate them. Not at all. But you can't say you love them. And as we have talked about so many times here, the best way to share the Gospel is through your personal testimony.

The strongest argument for the Gospel of Christ is the personal testimony of someone whose life has been changed by it. **Charles Bradlaugh**, an avowed atheist, once challenged the **Rev. H.P. Hughes** to a debate. This was back in the 1800's. The preacher, Hughes, who was head of a rescue mission in London, England, accepted the challenge with the condition that he could bring with him 100 men and women who would tell what had happened in their lives since trusting Christ as their Savior. They would be people who once lived in deep sin, some having come from poverty-stricken homes caused by the vices of their parents. Hughes said they would not only tell of their conversion, but would submit to cross-examination by any who doubted their stories. Furthermore, the minister invited his opponent to bring a group of non-believers who could tell how they were helped by their lack of faith. When the appointed day arrived, the preacher came, accompanied by 100 transformed persons. But Bradlaugh never showed up. The result? The meeting turned into a testimony time and many sinners who had gathered to hear the scheduled debate were converted. ([Sermon Illustrations](#))

We are going through a sermon series on the different approaches to telling others the Gospel. We have seen the **direct approach** by Peter, the **intellectual approach** by Paul and the **testimonial approach** by the blind man. All of these are good approaches to use if that is your personality and if you are using the gifts that God gave you and could be used for people in several different circumstances whether you knew them or not.

But today we are going to look at the **relational approach**. Those other approaches so far are fine for telling complete strangers if that works for you but the relational approach is for the long game; the long-term approach that requires you knowing someone well enough that you have earned the right to speak truth to them and our inspiration for this

approach is the Gospel writer **Matthew**. Did you know that in Matthew's book that bears his name that he never says a word? Isn't that interesting? He never quotes himself or throws in his two cents. His whole book is just constantly pointing to Jesus. That's something we can learn from right there. *"Don't look at me. Look at Jesus."*

I want to read just two short verses that most people probably read right over but we can see something important and inspirational in these verses if we look close enough. Turn to **Matthew 9** and let's read **verses 9-11**. Matthew was a tax collector and most of you know that back in those days, tax collectors were usually dishonest and took advantage of anybody they could so most people absolutely hated them. But when Matthew met Jesus, I want you to see how Matthew's life was changed...and how it wasn't changed.

[Matthew 9:9-11](#) *9As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

That Jesus must have had some kind of magnetic personality, don't you think? He spoke two words and Matthew left his job. No two weeks' notice. No phone call to his boss to explain. Jesus said "follow" and he followed and he never went back. Matthew's life was changed forever. Not only did he quit his job that day but he made a decision that would change how he lived and how he died. This was no half-hearted decision. He knew that even if he wanted to, he could never go back and yet, he never asked a question. He never paused. He didn't have to think about it or ask Siri. *"Follow me."* Boom! Done. His life changed in so many ways in that instant.

But I want you to see just how Matthew's life didn't change. Look at **verse 10** again. *"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples."* Now, when it says, "tax collectors and sinners", this is not the country club where some sophisticated businessmen plot some white-collar misdemeanors. These were thugs and bullies and basically just big ol' meanie-heads.

Tax collectors were not respectable people to the Jewish society. They were considered traitors to their country and their religion and no upstanding Jew would dare be seen with them. So, that leaves some serious sinners. We are talking about the dregs of society. These are not the pretty people. This is a rough crowd. Matthew obviously had not yet read that commandment that says, *"Thou shalt not hang out with sinful folks."*

Look at this. Matthew's life has changed...but his friends have not. Now, first let me tell you what I am NOT saying. Let me explain what I am NOT encouraging. If you got saved and you are coming out of an addictive lifestyle, you need to never see any of those so-called friends ever again. If there are people in your life that helped you get high or partied with you or drank with you to the point of addiction, those folks are on their own as far as you are concerned.

I met a guy in jail years ago that got saved, got off drugs and became a youth minister in a local church. He was clean for a long time and finally felt confident that he could go witness to his old partying buddies. He found them and one thing, as it always does, led to another and...well...I met him in jail. It happens all the time and it will happen to you. Let somebody else witness to those people.

But what Matthew did was invite Jesus to meet his friends because he wanted his friends to meet Jesus. He had a relationship with these people and he wanted them to have a relationship with Jesus. It didn't matter to Matthew what kind of sinners these people were because he knew it didn't matter to Jesus what kind of sinners these people were. Really bad, nasty, ugly sinful people need Jesus just as much as people who sin in "pretty" ways and "acceptable" ways.

Do you believe that Jesus doesn't care what kind of sins you commit? What's the limit on the number of sins Jesus will forgive? I need to know because if there's a number, I'm pretty sure I blew past it a long time ago. How bad of a person do you have to be for Jesus not to forgive you? I need to know because He has forgiven me of some really ugly stuff. The Bible verse that answers all those questions is **1 John 1:9** that says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from **all** unrighteousness."* All unrighteousness! The number doesn't matter and the severity doesn't matter. All unrighteousness! Thank you, Lord!

Now, when the Pharisees asked the disciples the question in **verse 11**, *"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* this was a rhetorical question. They didn't want an answer. They were pointing out the fact that no Jew in good standing with the law and the temple and with the ways of polite religion would be seen with such trash. They were unclean people and were making the disciples and Jesus unclean.

And that is just what religion is good for. It is good for pointing out flaws in people. It's good for listing rules and for giving laws that can't be followed. Matthew didn't introduce his friends to religion and we shouldn't either. Matthew introduced his friends to Jesus and we

should too. Matthew didn't introduce them to Jesus so they would become better people, able to hob-nob with the uppity-ups. He introduced them to Jesus so they would **have life!**

A few years ago, I went with some of my family to the Victory Temple Ministries luncheon in Fort Worth. They have this lunch on the first Thursday of every month and everyone is welcome. I didn't know what to expect but what I found was a place that is made for drug addicts and alcoholics who truly want to turn their lives around.

Since 1992, over 15,000 men and women have gone through their 6-month program to kick their addictions. It is a free program but it is not easy. You wouldn't expect anything to be easy to break the chains of addiction. At this lunch there was a powerful time of worship and praise with testimonies of several men and women who got up and spoke about what their lives had been like before they met Jesus, how they came to know Jesus and then what their lives had been like since they met Jesus.

The Victory Home gives them a safe place to come to, feeds them, trains them and then sends them out as disciples. It is all relationship-based. I said it is a program but the pastor of the home got up and spoke and said that it's not really just a program. They don't bring addicts to a program. They don't bring addicts to a home. They bring addicts to Jesus and watch Him change their lives.

They start a relationship with men and women that most of society has given up on. They prove to these people that they care about them, love them, show them that they have worth and value to them, to God and the ministry and they build trust with them and when they are ready and God has dealt with their hardened hearts then Jesus comes in and changes them forever. It is grace and love and forgiveness and hope lived out over and over again and God gets all the glory.

It's not easy. It sometimes takes a long time. It is costly in terms of time, talent and money. It always is and it will be for you. But how bad do you have to hate somebody not to tell them about the Good News of Jesus Christ that is going to change their lives forever?

Who is God calling you to start a relationship with? Is it your neighbor, your co-worker, your friend from before you were saved? Maybe God is leading you to just invite them over for dinner or to watch a ballgame. How hard is that? You're going to be watching the game anyway. Why not invite that lost friend over so you can start investing in their life for eternity? You don't have to hammer them with scripture when they show up. Just enjoy your time together and when the time is right, then invite them to Jesus. That's the

relational approach. If you have a relationship with Jesus and you have a personality like Matthew had and you have the gifts that God gave you, maybe you should try it.

**\*Music\***

If you don't have a relationship with Jesus, I want to invite you to right now. I'm not inviting you to religion. I'm not even inviting you to be a member of our church. I'm inviting you right now to a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. When you accept Him and truly believe in Him as Lord and Savior, then He will forgive your sins and change your life forever. Why not do that right now as the music plays?

**Victory Temple Ministries** [www.victorytempleministries.com](http://www.victorytempleministries.com)

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