

## **“The Living Room”**

**Colossians 3:12-15**

**7/26/09**

### **Fostering healthy relationships.**

[could I have some youth come up and sit in each area as they are “supposed” to and see which they prefer?]

The youth have done something great this week. It is simply awesome that all of you would give an entire week to work so hard all for someone else. And of course so many others who did too—Mike Nisonger, Jon Keller, Betsy Nisonger, and I know many others who have been working for many weeks now to complete the Extreme Home Makeover Project.

You have changed a person’s life in ways you will never fully know. All in the name of Christ. Awesome. I can’t wait to see all the photos and hear your stories from the week. The house looks great.

We have been walking through our own homes the past couple weeks—cleaning out the hall closet, cooking up some good stuff in the kitchen.

Today we enter into the living room as we talk about our relationships.

Yes, the living room. The way I grew up I am not sure why we called it the living room, because we never did live in it. You know what I mean? Now, mom and dad, if you read or watch this, I’m just teasing!

But we had the living room, where all the best stuff was—the nice furniture that you were never allowed to sit on, the lamps that I am not sure we ever turned on, the carpet that hardly got walked on.

Not a whole lot of living going on in there!

The only occasions we ever spent any time in there was when we had guests to the house. Someone came over—and you knew if they didn’t know us very well because they went to the front door, because we never used the front door because it opened into the living room. Someone came over and what is your first directive for them? “Shall we sit down in the living room?”

Alright, now I get it.

Okay, now we’re in the living room, but how do you sit in someone’s living room? You sit up straight and proper on the nice furniture. If you are given a cup of coffee it’s like sitting there holding a newborn baby—as absolutely careful as you can because it is life and death if it is dropped.

And now what are you supposed to do? Relax and be yourself! Right!

I think I just killed any chance of being invited to anyone’s house ever again! ☺

Sorry. I know I am painting a bleak picture. Forgive me, but it is a fun image to indulge in. Because we know how it is to experience that formal moment when neither person is completely relaxed.

So what does all this have to do with this morning’s message about fostering healthy relationships?

Well, As Joseph and I agreed as we played with this image of the living room, he and I both would rather hang out in the family room. That’s where the worn out couch is that fits your exact bodily dimensions, where the carpet is that clearly has lived through many a dirty foot and spilled coffee—or maybe just bare wood floor so all you have to do is sweep it up. It’s maybe where the fireplace is, and that perfect spot for reading.

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And, most importantly, it's where you go with those who are close to you to relax and be yourselves and talk.

Yes, today is about fostering healthy relationships, and to use our imagery of the living and family rooms, our goal in all our relationships is to move from the living room into the family room.

How does that happen?

**Colossians 3:12-15.**

*"As chosen ones, holy and dearly loved."*

**First, God has invited you into His family room.**

Imagine Jesus as the doorway from the living room to the family room. God has chosen us from the beginning of the world to be in His family. And He enabled us through Jesus His Son.

For many people in history, God seemed to be the God of the living room—impersonal and inaccessible.

**[Model of Second Temple Photo]**

The Jewish Temple was set up such that the further inward you went into the Temple the closer you got to God. The very outer part of the Temple was the only place a non-Jewish person could be. Then, as you made your way deep inside, the very inner room, the Holy of Holies, was reserved only for the High Priest to enter once a year, for there was God. Access for the regular folks was impossible.

But now we have been given access to God through Jesus, by His saving grace, that we are loved unconditionally and forgiven of the sin in our lives. The Temple curtain separating us from God has been torn in half, opened up.

As Ephesians 1:5 says, *"God destined us for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ."* Through Christ we are adopted into His family. We're in. And so you can be yourself. Relax. Lie back on the couch—it's comfortable. Be real. If you spill your drink, God's big hand isn't gonna come out and slap you across the head for it.

God says, It's okay, I forgive you. And God's grace says, You sit down and I will clean it up.

God has transformed our relationship with Him from the living room into the family room. From the pristine room where no living happens, to the family room where we become relaxed and truly live and find wholeness in relationship.

That is our call for all our relationships. God has done it for us, and so we follow in His perfect example. Are we going to mess it up? Of course we will. But we do our best.

*"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."*

**Make others feel at home.**

Take them from the living room into the family room.

Let me give a great image for this. My family and I have had the blessing of dining in the homes of many different people. I want to share two with you, both from PA:

One was the home of a very wealthy couple. As we stepped into their beautiful home, our evening began with a tour, which was great. I enjoy seeing how others live and I was glad for their success.

But the evening continued in that way—all about them. It was difficult to relax. I began to feel as if I was given some special privilege to be in their home. As I carefully walked through the house, I increasingly felt as if I was a lesser mortal, not quite up to their level. The evening was not really about us as guests.

Now, contrast that with another dinner experience, with a family we know in PA. They too have a big beautiful house. But immediately I sensed a much different atmosphere. We

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walked in their front door which was kept wide open. Throughout the evening, our children and Shelley and I were free to roam around their house at our leisure. They spent time sitting and truly listening to us. We ate together out on the back porch on comfortable chairs. The evening was clearly centered around us as their guests. The hostess, wife and mother of two young children who works full-time, said to Shelley the next day that she cleans the day after she has guests. Maybe she just didn't have time to clean before we came over, but I thought it made a statement about who they are that she didn't worry about the house being perfect, she just wanted us to feel at home.

Neither dining in fine proper fashion nor dining in a relaxed way is better or worse than the other. Both can be great. But it was the focus on the guests rather than the focus on what the hosts were doing for the guests that made the difference.

I thought to myself, that whether I was served Surf-and-Turf or Peanut butter and jelly—it really doesn't matter. What matters is spending time with the people around me. What matters is knowing that the person who invited me really wants me there and shows it by being attentive to who I am.

**Do others feel at home in your house?**

Yes literally, but also at home with you as a person. These five character traits we heard from Colossians—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience—are all about being attentive to the other person in your presence.

**Be attentive to others.**

That means listen. Understand. Give. Wait.

Just as Jesus tore the curtain in two, remove those barriers that get in the way of truly being present with one another. As Jesus showed, it starts with you making the first move and being active in all this. These words are action words. Don't expect the other person to take the lead, but you take the lead.

Bring them into the family room.

Well, and when you do, guess what? Something probably is going to get spilled. You spend enough time together, as careful as you may try to be, sometimes it happens.

I just did that last time we were in PA. We stopped by some friends' house, just for a quick visit. But, just like I am talking about this morning, they had to have us sit down and relax and brought me a cup of coffee.

Well, sure enough, I dumped on their chair. If you've ever done that, you know how that feels. I felt like a fool, apologizing up and down.

And all I heard in return was, "Pete, it's okay. It just adds to the character of the chair."

Grace. Forgiveness. "*Forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you,*" Colossians says.

**Be forgiving of others.**

Oftentimes when it comes to relationships we get this perfect image of how a relationship should work. For instance, we think we're going to have a perfect family, a perfect house, and we're going to raise perfect kids and they're going to go off to their perfect lives and we're going to sail off to a perfect retirement. Right! That is not reality. Life is not perfect. So what do we do?

You go to God with your disappointments. The beginning point is recognizing that He can meet needs that no one else can meet. One of the reasons we are vastly disappointed in a relationship is we expect people to meet needs in our life that only God can meet. And so of course we're disappointed. You expect a person to be perfect? Only God is perfect! He's the only one that can meet that need in your life.

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That's not to lessen those relationships you have, but it only strengthens them when we put God first. Shelley and I talk about that all the time. God is first in our lives, because then we are able to love as He loves.

And sometimes it means forgiveness. You're either going to bail out or stick it out. When you said, "I do," or you had that new baby or you started that friendship, all you thought about was the promise that was in that relationship. But right now some of you are face to face with the disappointment that's a part of that relationship. What are you going to do now?

*"Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you."*

1 Corinthians 13:7 says, *"Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful and endures through every circumstance."* That's real life. You face real disappointments. Where are you going to find the strength to not give up? You go to God with your disappointments. You let Him meet needs that only He can meet in your life. And you let Him give you the strength and the power to love in a way you've never loved before.

Living room to the family room.

What about those times when you don't feel disappointment, you don't feel hurt, you don't feel anger. The truth is you just don't feel anything any more. It's just apathy. What do you do then?

**Open up the communication lines.**

Okay, so maybe you finally move into the family room, and then comes that awkward silence with someone. Or that "elephant" appears in the room—something wrong between you that neither wants to talk about.

Some of you took a vow of silence a long time ago in a relationship. A long time ago you decided, "We're not going to talk about *that* any more." And the longer you don't talk about it the more the feelings are going to drain out of your life. You don't have to suffer in silence. Are you going to be the one who stands up and says, "I'm going to break this vow of silence. We do have a problem. Let's start to work on it. Let's get some help."

You're thinking, "There's going to be an argument if I say that." Maybe so. But you've suffered in silence long enough and when you stop the silence and begin to deal with the problem, then the feelings can begin to return.

Lamentations 5:21 says, *"Turn us around and bring us back to You again. That is our only hope. Give us back the joys we used to have."* That's a verse about our relationship with God. For some of you, that's where you need to start. Ask Him to bring back the joys you used to have in your relationship with Him. Once you've done that, ask Him to bring back the joys you used to have in your relationship with other people. Trust God with your feelings. No one is better than God at turning things around.

Philippians 2:3 says, *"Don't be selfish. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself."* Where are you going to find the strength to do that? The verse ends by saying, *"Your attitude should be the kind that was shown by Jesus Christ who though He was God did not demand and cling to His rights as God."*

Do you realize, that just doing one thing unselfishly this next week because of the example of Jesus Christ and the power He gives can bring change to your family? One unselfish act. One unselfish word. It can change everything. Sometimes everything hinges on that one moment of unselfishness. Write off the ideas of perfection and ask instead for growth, ask instead for doing one thing differently this next week.

Take that step from the living room into the family room. It's a lot more fun. Amen.