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## ***Choosing Satisfying Relationships***

I believe *Life is all about Relationship!* This belief comes from the biblical foundation of God's ultimate relationship with us, his created. The original design and intention of relationship is seen in principles throughout the Bible-fellowship, community, friendship, social customs, covenants, marriage and in the giving and sharing of ourselves with others. We are actually MADE for relationship! One of the first things assessed for when couples come for counseling is whether they give me the impression they are a couple, or two individuals. Many times they have stopped sharing not only their thoughts, hopes and dreams, but spend little time together and rarely say words to their partner showing they value and love them. Who, or what, has *made* them think and act independently?

William Glasser, M.D. believes most problems people have all come from one source-unsatisfying relationships. He created 'Choice Theory' which he says is a psychology of personal freedom. Good relationships are important to a successful life and people *choose* everything they do, including feeling miserable. As for the couple feeling isolated and acting independently, no circumstance or person has *made* them stop showing value and love; they have *chosen* to do so. We have all heard that love is a choice. From a Godly view, we see Christ loved us while we were still unlovable, yet he chose to love us anyway-unconditional love.

The results of broken relationships are well known: emotional pain, hurt, bitterness, envy, resentfulness, distress, anxiety, worry, anger, isolation and loneliness just to name a few. So what choices can help build and maintain healthy, meaningful relationships? First, we can choose to commit to change bad habits or behavior and self defeating and negative thoughts about ourselves or partner. We can refrain from speaking words that criticize, label or tear down. A choice can be made not to withdraw or isolating ourselves. We can choose to spend a greater amount of time spent together and sharing more activities. Next we can choose to communicate more effectively. We can learn, and then practice, basic listening skills of attending (body position, eye contact, nodding the head), paraphrasing (determining the content and emotional tone and summarizing that understanding back to your partner), checking out (asking if you understood correctly what they said), and confirming (affirming or correcting an understanding in the conversation). Another thing we can do to have more satisfying relationships is to choose to have productive conflict. Conflict is a normal part of life. But the manner in which it is handled determines an outcome of healthy and effective mutual solutions, or damaging and destructive battles that may further deteriorate the relationship.

God's word shows us many choices we can make to help us not only live in peace, but have satisfying, enjoyable relationships. Each of us can choose to forgive, not to judge others, be more selfless, we can honor our fathers and mothers, we can love our neighbor as ourselves, spouses can submit to one another just as they submit to Christ, husbands can love their wives like Christ loved the church, wives can respect their husbands, and parents can raise their children well. The thing about *Life is all about Relationship*- though true- is that it is not necessarily about enjoyable, satisfying relationships. We choose that part, and have to work on that part; it generally does not just happen all on its own. We choose to forgive and to love, and we choose to be intentional in working on our relationships. I hope you choose well, and that you will choose to find your source of strength and unconditional love in the one who created you for relationship from the very beginning. God's best to you!

***Mike***