

SCRIPTURE READING: Ecclesiastes 10:10.

INTRODUCTION:

Consistent effectiveness in relationships is always achieved by balancing the production of the results we seek with the maintenance of the assets that produce those results.

Storing up firewood for the winter analogy. Ecclesiastes 10:10. Consistent effectiveness in storing up firewood for the winter is always achieved through a balance of splitting logs and sharpening one's axe. Productivity is hindered if either is neglected at the expense of the other. **Explain.**

The same is true of relationships. Take marriage for example. Ephesians 5:33. If a husband wants respect, he must maintain the asset that produces respect, i.e. his wife.

If we extend the previous metaphor, what is the firewood? The axe?

Prior to marriage, most men sharpen their axes. **Explain.** During the honeymoon, many men just split logs. **Explain.** Such men "maintained" their axes before marriage so they would be "maintained" by their axes after marriage. As a result, the edge of the axe quickly dulls, the honeymoon is soon over, and neither spouse is pleased with the state of the relationship.

What goes for husbands goes for wives.

What is true of marriage is true of all other relationships. God (Revelation 2:4-5); children; parents; friends; brethren; etc.

This morning I want to talk about ten undeniable truths about effective relationships. When we're done, I hope we all fully appreciate why this is such a vitally important lesson.

TEN UNDENIABLE TRUTHS ABOUT EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

1. **We must value effective relationships.** Consistent effectiveness in relationships – with God, other people, and ourselves – is the key to joy in life. In scripture it's called peace and it's produced by love. Galatians 5:22.
2. **There is synergy in effective relationships.** Synergy is "the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects" (New Oxford American Dictionary). It's at the heart of the expression, "They feed off each other." Synergy is one reason to value and build effective relationships – we are more blessed by them than we can possibly be without them. Ecclesiastes 4:7-12; Proverbs 31:10-11. And it's not just about the easy relationships. The most enriching relationships are often the most difficult relationships.
3. **Magic in effective relationships is anything but magic.** It's just the result of plain old hard work. How much magic would there be if two people treated each other on their first few dates the way they would if they had been married several years?
4. **We must constantly maintain to produce, sharpen to cut.** There is no way around it. If we want effective relationships, we can only cut so long before we have to sharpen the axe. If we get another axe, we'll eventually end up right back where we started. It is eternally and temporally far less expensive to sharpen the axe we have than to go out and buy another one.
5. **The longer we neglect maintenance, the more we'll have to do to get the asset back in good working order.** There are no quick fixes. "You can never talk yourself out of problems you behaved yourself into" (Stephen R. Covey). Develop the axe analogy.
6. **Maintain as much as possible.** The sharper the axe, the greater the desired results and the better undesirable results will be taken in stride. Illustrate the former with the king/queen illustration; the latter with my recent examples of assuming the best (1 Corinthians 13:7) vs. evil surmisings (Romans 1:29; 1 Timothy 6:4). What was the difference? The state of the relationship!



7. **To get the best, we must be the best.** Must respect be earned? Yes and no. All elders should be respected, but those who rule well should be doubly respected. 1 Timothy 5:17. “You can buy a person’s back, but not their mind. You can buy a person’s hand, but not their heart. That kind of dedication, commitment, and loyalty must be earned” (Stephen R. Covey).
8. **God has shown us how to maintain effective relationships.**
- A. **Genuinely care.** Romans 12:9.
- B. **Use simple kindnesses and courtesies.** Say would you, please, thank you, good job, hello, how are you today, good morning, good night, yes sir, no mam, excuse me, you go first, may I help you, make eye contact, smile, wave, touch, etc. “In relationships the little things are the big things. One woman told of growing up in a home where there was a plaque on the kitchen wall that read: ‘To do carefully and constantly and kindly many little things is not a little thing’ (Stephen R. Covey).
- C. **Be honest.** Psalms 15:1-2.
- D. **Be loyal.** Psalm 15:3. “If you want to retain those who are present, be loyal to those who are absent because what do they know you are going to be like when other people are bad mouthing them to you behind your back. It’s far greater to be trusted and respected than it is to be liked” (Stephen R. Covey).
- E. **Be faithful, reliable, dependable.** Keep promises, commitments. Psalms 15:4.
- F. **Manage expectations.** “You will find the root cause of almost all relationship difficulties, breakdowns, come from conflicting expectations surrounding roles and goals” (Stephen R. Covey).
- G. **Etc.**
- H. **If you blow any of the above, learn to say, “I’m sorry. I apologize.”** “We all do blow them from time to time, but the one thing that people will not forget or forgive is a cover up. Even presidents can be deposed through cover ups. The anatomy of cover up usually is pride and leads to defensiveness, self protection, self justification, accusation of other people and the whole relationship deteriorates. You’ve often seen it even in marriages (that go, *tdn*) from one of spontaneity and richness, softness – to one of accommodation – to one of toleration – into various forms of hostility that may break out in hot wars in a legal court or cold wars in the four wall of your own home which ooze out into the emotional atmosphere, the ecology of the home, a powerful osmosis kind of teaching to the next generation where they learn that the way to solve problems is to fight, to take each other on or to flight, to withdraw to give up, to capitulate. Dominant Dan Dorothy Doormat may seem to have a harmonious marriage but remember that unexpressed feelings never die. They are buried alive and come forth later in uglier ways” (Stephen R. Covey).
9. **As goes one relationship, so often goes all.**
10. **It’s not just about the sharpening, it’s also about the blade.** Some blades don’t easily take or long hold an edge. Romans 12:18. We must do the best we can with the assets we have. Remember, it’s not about what we wish was. It’s about what is. Assets, be the best assets you can possibly be! This relationship is just as important to you.

