

Relationships at Work: Some Biblical Insights- Part 1

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0. Introduction

Relationships at work often have a significant impact on our experience of work. The number of relationships at work - with bosses, those under our authority,

co-workers, customers, suppliers, and the community – must be juggled simultaneously rather than one at a time. And often these relationships are with people we might not ordinarily choose. Additionally, the conditions for our workplace relationships can add to the challenge. These interactions are pressured by deadlines and high stress over extended periods of time. In these situations, workers can come together in amazing ways, but can also face tension. The duration and intensity can lead any number of outcomes, from friendships to great animosity or to inappropriate relationships. When relationships are confounded by performance based objectives it becomes easy to treat the other person as a means to an end rather than an end in and of themselves. Increasingly workplace relationships are mediated by technology, and this can have an impact on our understanding of the other person.

For the Christian in the workplace, the relationship issues take on an added dimension. The Christian is called to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, even at work! We know that every person is made in the image of God and is worthy of our respect. We also know that every person is deeply affected by sin, and we ourselves are so affected. In addition to all this, the Scripture reminds us that the way we treat another person reflects our relationship with God.

Workplace relationships are also affected by position and power. The relationship between a boss and another person in the organization looks quite different from one between colleagues. When the relationships involve customers, suppliers, or the community there is a more ambiguous role for power. For example, the pending approval of a new building project for a business may lead to a different kind of relationship between the company and city representatives than does a Chamber of Commerce collaboration. This role of position and power is a distinguishing feature of why workplace relationships look different from other types of relationships.

Together, these factors remind us that healthy relationships are challenging, particularly in the workplace, and at the same time are important and vital to

our spiritual lives as Christians. We explore numerous dimensions of these issues:

- Why are relationships at work so important spiritually?
- Why are these relationships so difficult?
- How do we avoid unnecessary conflict at work (without ducking important and necessary conversations)?
- When conflict comes, how do we resolve and restore relationships?
- How do we deal with technology-mediated relationships?
- How do we deal with the different types of relationships (boss, subordinate, colleague, customer, etc.) in our workplaces?

All of these questions point to things that could go wrong in our relationships. How can the leader of a workplace organization create a healthy organizational culture which fosters good relationships? And does our biblical understanding shed light on this question?

The Scripture has a great deal to say about all of these questions, both by instruction and by example. There is also a growing literature, both Christian and secular, from organizational behavior, counseling, and psychology dealing with aspects of this subject. Sometimes there is strong alignment between these fields, but not always. We will draw on many Biblical examples, including from the *Theology of Work Bible Commentary*, and will also bring in a few ideas from the secular literature. Many secular books have been written on relationships, and it is outside the scope of this article to address this part of the discussion in any extensive way.

We have organized this paper into the following major sections:

1. Biblical foundations for relationships in general

2. Some ideas from the fields of psychology and brain science
3. Relationships at work
 - a. General guidelines
 - b. Different types of relationships (boss, subordinate, colleague)
 - c. Technology mediated relationships
 - d. Creating an organizational culture with supportive relationships
4. Broken relationships, and a model (and motivation) for repairing them
5. Sample case studies dealing with potential conflict areas
6. Summary and conclusions

1. Biblical Foundations for Relationships



From the opening pages of the Bible we see God as a God of relationships.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,” (Genesis 1:26-27).

In saying, “Let *us* make man...” (emphasis added) we see the Trinitarian God in relationship. That is, relationship is inherent in the identity and character of the triune God. Then we see God creating humans, male and female, to work together in carrying on the work that God had begun.

In the TOW document on Genesis, we conclude,

“...that God is inherently relational. Within the created universe, God is present in relationship with his creatures and especially with people. Laboring in God’s image, we work *in* creation, *on* creation, *with* creation and—if we work as God’s intends—*for* creation.”

Though the all-powerful God could carry out his creation by the word of his power, he chose to carry on this work through human beings. Again from the TOW document on Genesis, we observe,

A crucial aspect of relationship modeled by God himself is delegation of authority. God delegated the naming of the animals to Adam, and the transfer of authority was genuine. “Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name”(Gen. 2:19), (Theology of Work biblical article, Genesis 1-11, 2013).

When sin came into the world by the act of the human beings, it was the broken relationships that are mentioned first. The Genesis TOW document says it this way:

By choosing to disobey God, they break the relationships inherent in their own being. Together, they break their relationship with God, no longer talking with

him in the evening breeze, but hiding themselves from his presence (Gen. 3:8). Adam breaks the relationships between himself and Eve, blaming her for his decision to eat the fruit, and getting in a dig at God at the same time. “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” (Gen. 3:12). In the generations that followed, alienation nourished jealousy, rage, even murder. All workplaces today reflect that alienation between workers—to greater or lesser extent—making our work even more toilsome and less productive. (Theology of Work biblical article, Genesis 1-11, 2013)

Some conclude that this image bearing attribute of human beings, so vital in the creation, was lost as a result of the fall. But we are reminded again of the reality of image bearing, even in the presence of sin in Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” This point is repeated by James, again in the presence of sin, in James 3:8-9: “no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

In Exodus and Deuteronomy God lays out his moral law in the Ten Commandments where the relationships with God and our relationships with each other are tied together. When asked about what command is the greatest, Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). So we again see the priority of relationships.

In Matthew 5, Jesus reiterates this principle for his Kingdom when he says, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). Not only is our relationship with others tied to our relationship with God, but God introduces a sense of urgency in resolving things when they get broken.

John adds another dimension to this connection when he says, “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness,” (1 John 1:9). It is as if that other person represents God, and how we relate to that other person is how we relate to God.

In Galatians, Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-24). All of these characteristics are reflected when we interact with others.

Two other foundational elements for relationships found in Scripture are the fact that each person is unique and different from us, and each of us tend toward selfishness. The first tells us that we will see things differently and have different emphases and passions. This can be a strength when we come together bringing our different gifts and abilities. The second is that, because of sin, we tend to focus on ourselves rather than others, and this is deadly for relationships. Paul brought these two concepts together in Romans 12:3-17:

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

Here we see that others we encounter through life, and specifically at work, are gifted by God in different ways. We cannot expect others to approach the world or tasks at work in the same way we ourselves might approach them. This passage goes on to emphasize the importance of our own attitudes and behaviors in how we interact with others:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above

yourselves...Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

We fall short of the ideal in our relationships because of our own sinfulness and the sinfulness of others. This is why it is important to be able to heal broken relationships (the focus of Section 4). While in this life there may be brokenness that we cannot resolve, Paul reminds us that insofar as it is up to us, we should live peaceably with everyone around us.

So far we have identified a number of biblical concepts related to relationships:

1. God is a God of relationships; this is a fundamental part of his character
2. We are made in the image of God, and so is the other person at work
3. Sin has impacted all of our relationships, and has impacted us
4. Other people we encounter in the workplace are different from us, uniquely gifted and unique in the way they see things
5. We are challenged to work well with others, not thinking only of ourselves.

We will further explore these ideas in the context of different types of relationships at work to motivate, challenge, and seek a means for successfully navigating these relationship challenges at work.

2. Psychological Insight for Relationships



Perhaps one of the most important elements for a healthy relationship is the ability to view the world from another's perspective. Fundamentally, relationships are not possible without this ability, which is referred to in the psychological literature as "theory of mind" (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). If we are not capable of understanding someone else's thoughts, feelings, reactions or motivations – that is, to put ourselves in someone else's shoes – we are unable to have empathy for them or to understand the thought process they have gone through to come to the conclusions they do. John Medina, brain scientist and author of *Brain Rules*, often summarizes this as, "What is obvious to you, is obvious to you." Don't assume the other person thinks as you do.

Theory of mind appears to develop throughout childhood, and is influenced by a number of factors. But social experience tends to be a primary predictor of "perspective taking" – or the ability to see something through someone else's eyes. That is, the more we interact with others who are different from ourselves,

the better we become at understanding their view of the world. One of the tests used to assess theory of mind in children is known as the false-belief task (Wimmer & Perner, 1983). An example of this test might be a series of pictures showing “Anthony” setting a book down on a table and walking away, followed by someone else moving the book to a new place. When asked where Anthony will look for the book, kids who are developing a theory of mind will identify the table on which the boy placed it, whereas those lacking this capacity are more likely to identify the book’s actual location. By age four or five, most children are able to pass the false-belief test; they understand that not only do others sometimes have different perspectives than their own, but that others’ view of the world may not be accurate (e.g., “I know you think the book is on the table, but it is not actually there”). By the teen years, most people are able to understand multiple perspectives as well as social conventions, and make decisions based on accommodating others (Selman, 1971).

We can see the development of theory of mind in several examples throughout Scripture. For example, in the Old Testament story of Joseph, we see that Joseph wasn’t thinking of how his brothers would react when he told them in great detail about his dreams and what they meant both for him and for them. But when Joseph was standing before Pharaoh, we see someone who has grown in theory of mind. His words are directed at Pharaoh’s problem, even when Joseph was experiencing some significant problems of his own. We can also see different levels of theory of mind in the relationship between David and King Saul. David was able to see Saul’s perspective, supporting him as king and soothing him with his playing of the harp. Saul, on the other hand, always seemed to see David as a threat, and was unable to understand the honor and high regard with which David viewed him.

There are some conditions that limit the development of theory of mind, including autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders, schizophrenia, and some types of brain injury. People who have been diagnosed with one or more of these conditions often have trouble with social engagement, and

frequently don't realize how others perceive them. Often, kids on the autism spectrum do very poorly with the false-belief task. If they know something is true they have a hard time understanding why someone else might not have the same perspective.

In addition to atypical neurology which can impact theory of mind, there are behaviors people can engage in which may inhibit their ability to see things from others' perspective. Sleep deprivation, drug or alcohol dependence, and engaging in very limited interactions with others can all cause what is known as "mind-blindness," or the inability to understand things from another's point of view. As our culture becomes more dependent on computer-mediated social interactions, there are some preliminary indications that these shifts may be impacting our ability to recognize others' emotions, empathize with others, and engage in healthy relationships.

A recent study examined sixth graders who were given no access to electronic devices for five days. At the end of the experiment these students' ability to correctly identify the emotions conveyed in photographs of faces was significantly better than it had been prior to the five day experiment, and was also significantly better than a control group of sixth graders who had not been limited from accessing computers, smart phones and television during the same time frame. Because recognizing emotions is a central requirement of perspective taking, this experiment suggests that the more we engage with our devices, the less we may be capable of healthy relationships.

Those with a more robust theory of mind are more likely to become leaders, and tend to be better leaders than those with a less developed ability. This ability can be developed, but it requires time, effort, reflection, and the willingness to interact with a variety of different people. The more we try to understand others, the better our relationships are likely to become. Because theory of mind is necessary for healthy relationships, this may be one of the ways in which God's image is reflected in humanity.

On the other hand, those with a robust theory of mind can use this ability for manipulation by anticipating how the other person thinks and what conclusions they would draw. This is why theory of mind is not enough for healthy relationships, but simply a tool that must be accompanied by the biblical principles we outlined in the previous section.

3. Different Types of Relationships at Work



General Guidelines

No matter which kind of relationships we have at work, we know several things about them already. The other person is an image bearer of God. I am to treat that person with respect. In any relationship, I am impacted by my own sin, and so is the other person. The things that are so obvious to me may not be obvious to the other person, and vice versa. Relationship issues don't simply affect two

people—the quality of relationship between two people at work has the potential to affect everyone in the workplace.

The position of two individuals in a relationship at work also matters. We will consider three broad types of relationships: a person in authority with a person under that authority; the reciprocal view of the relationship by the one under authority; and a colleague relationship. All of the challenges inherent in these relationships are further compounded by personality, race, gender, and history. So beyond the general comments on relationships we will identify some of these compounding factors.

Technology introduces a new level of complexity to our relationships at work, but are a fundamental part of any 21st century work environment. New kinds of misunderstanding can develop from relationships “filtered” through a screen. Such interactions often lack the benefit of personal understanding or the nuance of body language. And frequently such filtered relationships result in our tendency to treat the other person as a utility or function rather than as a person made in God’s image.

One of the tough lessons about relationships at work is the need to focus on my own responsibility to the relationship, and not on the responsibility that others may have. As an employee with a difficult boss, for example, it is tempting to start with what the boss should do. But both a boss and the employee have responsibility for the relationship. Paul teaches this principle in Ephesians 6:5-9. When he talks to slaves, he tells them how they ought to act in the relationship with their masters, and when he talks with masters he tells them what they ought to do in their relationship with their slaves. Jesus makes the general point in his Sermon on the Mount: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:3-5

The long-term quality of a relationship may ultimately hinge on what the other person does, but it needs to start with my own responsibility. That responsibility includes trying to see things through the other person's eyes, not just my own. For that reason, the development of theory of mind is vital to this understanding.

Types of Relationships

From the Position of Authority



The people relationship is a bit different when it is a boss dealing with his or her employees. This is not about the roles and responsibilities of leaders, a much bigger subject. Rather we will briefly describe the implications for human relationships within this formal structure. As a starting point, we need to think about the position in the way Jesus viewed it in Matthew 20:25-27:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

We identified in the general remarks that the Scripture creates a link between how we love God and how we love others. This is applied directly to the way a boss deals with his or her workers. One example is in Isaiah 58:3:

‘Why have we fasted,’ *they say*, ‘and You have not seen?
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’

“In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure,
And exploit all your laborers.

Here Isaiah is talking about people who think they are loving God through their fasting. He reminds them their fasting is of no effect because they are exploiting those who work for them. Again we are reminded that we cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationships with our workers.

Keller and Alsdorf (2012) tell a wonderful story about a boss who put these ideas into practice. One of his employees had made a mistake that had an impact on the company. She thought she would be fired. But then she learned that when her boss had to explain the situation to his boss, that he had taken the blame at some cost to his career. When she pressed him for why he did this, he ultimately explained that since Jesus had taken the blame for his wrong, he should do the same for others.

What does this look like in day to day practice? General Peter Pace, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said:

I like to listen as much as I can. When I come into a new organization, I spend as much time as I can just talking to folks about what’s going

right and what's going wrong... You can find out their perspective and get their guidance on whatever is happening. Then I can put together my own thoughts of what I heard and make decisions. When we get together I tell people what I understand, where we're going to go, and how we can get there. But I always use examples of who told me what so that they know that I have been listening and paying attention. Those on the ground know a lot more about the details of what is going on than any senior officer, and I would be a fool not to gain from this knowledge.

Pace is reminding us that the structure should not get in the way of treating another person as a human being with dignity and worth. Trying to make objective decisions at work can sometimes interfere with our ability to treat others as image bearers of God. One of us once worked with a CEO who had very poor communications with his staff. When asked about this the man said he needed to maintain his distance in order to make objective decisions about compensation, promotion, and firing. While objectivity may be important, it should not trump relationships. Wayne Alderson, a former steel company vice president discussed how he handled this tension:

I became their friend, but I never lost my title. I never became buddy-buddy. I was a tough, disciplined yet fair leader. And through this we became a family. I still see some of these people, and their children and grandchildren, years later. You see, you can't run a business without committed employees.

Wouldn't people take advantage of a leader acting in these ways? Again, Alderson provides a helpful perspective:

We have a tendency in business to get things backward. We put in rules to protect ourselves from 10 percent of the people who might take advantage of us, and alienate 90 percent of the people in the process. We need to change the thinking. Manage the 10 percent, and

lead the 90 percent who want to do what is right. This type of leadership will create the environment where people choose to do quality work and be loyal to the company. When you touch the hearts of the people, you will win your work force and build your company.

Max DePree (1989) summarizes it this way in his book *Leadership is an Art*: “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant” (p. 9). He went on to say that this was not about ducking his responsibility as a leader. “Having a say is different from having a vote.”

Another place where this situation can go astray is when the person in authority befriends someone under his or her authority, creating the potential for favoritism for that individual. A wise leader, and teacher, will draw clear lines and communicate them clearly.

The one under Authority



Since most of us have a boss, the issue of how to deal with a challenging or difficult boss is one with which many people are familiar. This extends to a difficult teacher, a police officer or judge who may seem to be on a power trip, or any other of work relationships where the other person holds the power.

We must start by remembering that the option of walking away from a situation is a modern invention not open to the slaves of antiquity, nor many other workers in the world today. While walking away might be an option that should be exercised at times – particularly in an abusive situation – we should be careful in exercising it because we might lose the lessons we could gain. The power from the position impacts what and how I can communicate concerns. Paul reminds us that even a difficult boss should be seen through the lens of God. In addressing slaves, he says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men” (Colossians 3:23).

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that even a difficult boss is made in the image of God. We should try to see things through his or her eyes, applying the ideas of theory of mind from Section 2. What are the pressures she is under? What things are important to him? It is not just about me.

Al one time had a very difficult boss and one day learned that this boss had been the best man in his son's wedding. It was a reminder that if the man's son, who knew him best, valued him that highly, then it would be wise to look more carefully at the boss's qualities. Theory of mind then goes to thinking about the pressures and responsibilities from his point of view, not just from mine. It is also a reminder to see that person as an image bearer of God, even when it is difficult.

Peter Pace, former chairman of the joint-chiefs of staff addressed dealing with a boss in an interview in Ethix:

I will start by asking questions because this allows you to put a different idea on the table without being directly confrontational. Sometimes, it's just a matter of misunderstanding. If I ask a question, the boss gets a chance to educate you in what he really meant to say. It could be that by asking the question, the boss will realize what he or she is asking you to do is not right. This is a clear victory. Once you have asked enough questions and you are still of the mind that this is wrong, then you can be direct about it, just say, 'That's not who I am, I can't do that.'

Pace also suggested beginning with a level of humility, recognizing that there may be parts of the situation that your boss knows and you do not. He summarized this with the statement,

"You should always tell the truth as you know it, and you should understand that there is a whole lot that you don't know."

Good advice. But notice you might need to be prepared to walk away. You should be careful about where you take this stance. We have seen people take a stance on an issue that was decidedly secondary. It is important to be reminded that the organization you work for, and the boss you work directly for, is not perfect as you are not perfect. You may have a slightly different agenda from the boss, but make certain you are serving the agenda of the boss unless this takes you to a wrong place. Because of brokenness in our world, there may be situations where you can't do what the boss asks. Make sure these stances are for good reasons, not just personal preference. And be reminded that your relationship with the boss is not just about the two of you, but can affect many others. It is helpful to review the fruit of the spirit here, and ask whether a particular issue is done in patience, humility, and kindness leading to peace for the organization.

We have found it helpful to study the life of Joseph, where he served very difficult bosses in difficult circumstances: Potipher, the jailer, and Pharaoh. He worked hard and honorably, listened carefully, and did what needed to be done. Further discussion of Joseph in these situations can be found in *The Accidental Executive*.

A Colleague Relationship



The vast majority of relationships in the workplace do not involve the explicit power of one over another, but a broader relationship between, for example, students in a class, workers in an organization, or vice presidents reporting to the same president. It can also come between a salesperson and a potential customer, a contractor and those he or she is contracting with, or suppliers seeking to contract with a representative from a company. There is no formal authority lines between the two, but there are perceived paths of influence. Sometimes the issue is over real or perceived competition for resources (from budgets to promotions to grades to opportunities for assignments). Sometimes the issue is to seek to win a contract or a favor, even to return a purchase at a store as a customer. These relationships may be even more challenging than boss or subordinate because of the desire to influence the outcome without an authority structure. The other person can be seen as a means to personal gain, rather than as an image bearer of God.

Office politics is a well-known term used to describe the kind of “jockeying for position or favor” among such common reports to a boss, students in a class, etc. The other person is often seen as a rival, not as a real person. Peter Fox, former vice president at Microsoft, described how he approached this kind of relationship (a longer account is in Chapter 11 of *The Accidental Executive*.

I've seen otherwise committed colleagues turn on one another over a budget dollar or incremental headcount allocation. This behavior seems to be understood and taken in stride by many, when it completely astonishes me. My thinking is that my word and deeds are all I have for people to judge me by. Especially as a Christian, I know that how I live, the legacy I leave, how I teach and lead others, these are the ways I will be judged one day. That day could be today. I won't wait to leave my legacy and live for God's glory. I do it now, every day and every way I can.

One practical way I work this out might be seen in this example. When I believe it would be beneficial for the business if I took on a part of the organization now reporting to a colleague, I don't start by going to the boss about it. I start by talking with my colleague. I tell him why I believe what I do, and that I will be taking my proposal to the boss. But I don't blindside him with this information. I'm not standing still and settling for playing not to lose. I have learned how to play to win and keep my relationships whole. But it's not easy.

Such relationships cannot be contained between two people. A colleague relationship problem generally affects the entire team. A good relationship among colleagues can lead to a very productive team and a fun place to work. Creating a culture that encourages good relationships is an important thing, and we defer that discussion to a later section. The fruit of the spirit would be the very attributes that would lead with harmonizing relationships. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

There is a form of power that contractors holds over those who are awarded the contracts. Al one time worked with a person running a research program who spoke to all those making bids with the words, “Contractors are like pigs at a trough. You kick them away and they come squealing back.” They didn’t. By contrast, Jack vanHartesvelt decided that as a Christian he would enter into negotiations with a supplier with the goal of achieving a good result for both sides. He said, we set a goal of getting a good deal for both sides, not a goal of my trying to win at their expense.

We used language like, ‘What would be right for you? What would be right for me? How can I take advantage of you? How can you take advantage of me?’ Normally you don’t have those conversations. But we talked about it openly in that fashion, every provision. We tried to come up with something in each case that was fair, that was equitable in an absolute sense. It changed them. We stayed friends over the years and have done other hotel deals together.

Sometimes the desire to influence relationships without direct lines of authority extends to offering favors, even bribes. In this case, the person is being treated as an object for personal gain from the particular relationship, and the biblical teaching is very clear on “rejecting every type of evil,” I Thessalonians 5:22.

But we know there are difficult people in the workplace and you may have no choice about working with them. Perhaps at this time, with no other options, you can remember the words from James 1:2-5: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” This difficult challenge may be the key to spiritual growth.

It is in this category we should also consider people in an organization (business, school, hospital) with others in the community. Often it is the case that there is no direct power relationship between those in the community and those in the

organization, yet such relationships are vital to the thriving of cities and neighborhoods. All we have discussed about relationships comes into play here. Jeremiah reminds the children of Israel, even in exile to “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (29:7).

Relationships without a direct reporting line are often tilted by a money, power, or influence imbalance and a goal that has significant long-term potential for both sides. It is tempting to think of the other party as a utility or an obstacle to my own goals. Seeing that person as an image bearer of God and seeing the transaction as something of value to God changes this relationship.

Part 2 to be continued.

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