



WEEK THREE: CHARACTER THE KEY INGREDIENT

This week, we are focusing on two topics: authenticity and character. First, we will continue to unpack why it is so important to be radically honest if we want to grow and build authentic relationships with others. Then we will dig into the important role character plays in building healthy relationships by studying Colossians 3:1-14.

DAY ONE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:1-14
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 71-78
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the “Iceberg Principle”

◆ EXPLORE

This week we will spend the whole week exploring another “relational” passage in the New Testament: **Colossians 3:1-14**. Our goal is to better understand the connection between our character and our capacity to love others well. In this passage, the Apostle Paul describes what happens to us when we come to Christ and how this should impact the way we approach our relationships. **Start by reading this passage** today in the New International Version. Remember to put on your “relationship glasses” while you are reading. Watch for any specific instructions for how we should relate to one another, after coming to Christ.

- 1) According to this passage, how should we approach our relationships now that we have “risen” with Christ? Jot down any key thoughts, insights, or questions you have in your journal.

◆ READ

Read pages 71-78 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at Chapter 5 and stop at “Developing an Awareness of What I Am Feeling and Doing” (Audible Ch 8 – 00:05-15:40).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) In this chapter, Peter uses the illustration of an iceberg. How would you summarize the point he is making in your own words?

- 2) In Chapter 5, Peter writes,

For the first fifteen years of my life as a Christian (and the previous nineteen apart from Jesus), I rarely took time to look deeply into (as the psalmist alternately calls it) my interior, my heart, my depths, or my soul. Yes, I spent an average of two to three hours a day with God in prayer, Scripture reading, listening to God’s voice, confessing my sins, and

journaling. Regularly, I spent a day in prayer and fasting at a Jesuit retreat center near my house—and still do. Even so, I can confidently say that I was not taking a deep, hard look inside...

... an authentic relationship with Christ also takes us into the depths—the shadows, the strongholds and the darkness deep within our own souls that must be purged. Surrendering to this inward and downward journey is difficult and painful.

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p. 73

Can you relate to any part of Peter's description of his spiritual journey? If so, which part, and why?

3) Spend some time praying or journaling what you're learning from Colossians 3 and today's reading.

DAY TWO

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:1-14
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 78-86
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On radical honesty and radical grace

◆ EXPLORE

Yesterday you read **Colossians 3:1-14** in the New International Version. **Read the same passage** today—but this time in the New Living Translation (NLT). (You can find this on YouVersion.) Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through this passage—and remember to put on your “relationship glasses” as you search for insights into how to live a life of love.

- 1) Were there any key words, phrases, statements, or commands that stood out to you in a fresh way today? If so, make some notes in your journal.

◆ READ

Read pages 78-86 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at Developing an Awareness of What I Am Feeling and Doing and stop at the heading The Upcoming Wedding — A Symptom of Spiritual Immaturity (Audible Ch 8 – 15:40-35:33).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What stood out to you the most in this section? Was there a principle or insight you found particularly helpful or challenging? If so, describe it in your journal.

- 2) In Chapter 5, Peter writes,

There are many other important issues related to maturing in Christ, but an honest examination of our emotions and feelings is central. This inward look is not to encourage a self-absorbed introspection that feeds narcissism. The ultimate purpose is to allow the gospel to transform all of you—both above and below the iceberg. The end result will be that you and I will be better lovers of God and other people.

-*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p. 81

How do you think an “honest examination of our emotions and feelings” can help us become “better lovers of God and other people”?

Have you ever found yourself becoming too self-absorbed with your inner world in a way that “feeds narcissism”? If so, explain.

How do you think we can keep a healthy balance between self-awareness and self-absorption?

3) Further down on this page, Peter writes,

Without doing the work of becoming aware of your feelings and actions, along with their impact on others, it is scarcely possible to enter deeply into the life experiences of other people. How can you enter someone else's world when you have not entered your own?

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p. 81

Have you found this to be true in your own life?

4) Later in this chapter, Peter writes,

Going beneath the surface of our lives can feel as if we are walking on a tightrope fifty feet above ground without a safety net below. The gospel is like the safety net. It alone gives us the foundation to take the risk of stepping out onto the tightrope in order to explore our inner depths.

The gospel says you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet you are more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope because Jesus lived and died in your place...

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p. 83

Then he adds,

God has given us the gospel to create a safe environment to look beneath the surface. I don't have to prove that I'm lovable or valuable. I don't have to be right all the time. I can be vulnerable and be myself even if others don't accept me. I can take risks and fail. Why? Because God sees the 90 percent of the iceberg hidden below the surface, and He utterly, totally loves me in Christ.

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p. 85

Have you ever considered the depth of God's love for you? Have you experienced this freedom to be honest with yourself as he has described above? Write a prayer thanking God for His grace and love for you.

DAY THREE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:1-8
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 90-93 & 99-103
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the impact our family of origin has on our lives

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will continue our study of **Colossians 3:1-14** by focusing on **Colossians 3:1-8**. Before reading this passage, take a moment to ask God to speak to you through His Word and your reading today.

Now **read Colossians 3:1-8** in the Good News Translation (GNT). (You can find this on YouVersion.) As you read, remember that the author of Colossians (the Apostle Paul) expects us as Christ followers to live a life of love, but only because we have Jesus. We could never do this on our own strength! But since we have “risen with Christ”, we now have the power to change, to grow and to live a new life.

- 1) When Paul challenges us to “set your hearts on the things that are in heaven” (3:1), he is not telling us to live with our heads in the clouds! He is challenging us to live our new lives here on earth with heaven’s attitudes, values and priorities. He begins to explain what this looks like in verse 5. **Read Colossians 3:5 and 3:8** and make a quick bullet list of the actions, emotions, and pursuits we need to leave behind if we are going to love others well.
- 2) Quickly review your bulleted list. Which of these attitudes, emotions, and pursuits have characterized your life the most in the past? Which ones are still the biggest challenges for you now?
- 3) How do these types of attitudes, emotions, and pursuits undermine our relationships and keep us from living a life of love?

◆ READ

Read pages 90-93 and 99-103 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at Chapter 6 and stop at the heading King David and His Family on page 93. Start at Discerning the Major Influences in Your Life and stop at the heading Working Through the Church on page 103 (Audible Ch 9 - 00:01-08:16 and 18:20-27:43).

◆ REFLECT

1) Peter argues that one of the most powerful influences in our life is our family of origin. In chapter 6, he writes,

Numerous external forces may shape us, but the family we have grown up in is the primary and, except in rare instances, the most powerful system that will shape and influence who we are.

-*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p. 90

Do you agree or disagree with this conclusion—and why?

2) Later in this chapter, he writes,

Outside of ones' family of origin, it is important to consider what have been the other major influences in a person's life. ...people are shaped by significant events such as a divorce, sexual or emotional abuse, an addiction, a lengthy period of unemployment, a particular betrayal, or a friendship. The question to ask is, "What are a few events or people that have impacted who I am today and that will help me understand 'what makes me tick?'"

-*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p.99

Peter gives several examples of these types of events in the bullet points on page 99-100 or 96-97 in older versions of the book. (Audible Ch 9 - 19:27-21:00) Take a few minutes and ask the Lord to bring to your mind any events or experiences that have had a particularly profound influence on the way you approach relationships.

3) Later, Peter writes,

To become a Christian and to be adopted into God's family with the new name of "Christian" does not erase the past. God does not give us amnesia or do emergency emotional/spiritual reconstructive surgery. God does forgive the past, but He does not erase it...

Discipleship then must include honest reflection on the positive and negative impact of our family of origin as well as other major influences in our life. This is hard work. Following Jesus is a process that takes time. But the extent to which we can go back and understand how it has shaped us will determine, to a large degree, our level of awareness and our ability to break destructive patterns, pass on constructive legacies, and grow in love toward God and people.

-*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p. 102,103 excerpts

Do you find it more *natural* or *unnatural* to reflect on how your family of origin (and other significant people or events) have impacted your life and the way you do relationships? Why?

4) Write a prayer asking God to help you understand how your family of origin and other significant people and events have impacted the way you approach your relationships. If there are hurts there, take the time to talk with God about it in prayer.

DAY FOUR

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:9-14 & Ephesians 4:22-24
- ◆ **READ:** *Keeping Family Ties From Pulling Strings*, pgs. 41-46 (PDF)
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On God's vision for our lives and the influence of our family of origin

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will continue our study of **Colossians 3:1-14** by focusing on **Colossians 3:9-14**. Before you get started today, take a moment and ask God to meet with you. Then **read Colossians 3:9-14** in the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) (You can find this on YouVersion.) and then answer the following questions:

- 1) What is God's vision for our lives according to verse 10?
- 2) Now read **Ephesians 4:22-24**. Compare Colossians 3:9-10 with Ephesians 4:22-24. What similarities do you see between these two passages?
- 3) In Colossians 3:12, Paul lists five important character qualities we need to "clothe ourselves" with if we want to love others well. List these in your journal, using bullet points.
- 4) Take a moment to do a mental exercise. First, imagine two similar relationships in your mind. (This could be two marriages, two families, two Life Groups, two ministry teams, two work teams, etc.) Now imagine that in the first relationship, everyone is practicing the five character qualities you listed above. In the second relationship, these five character qualities are seldom practiced. What impact will these five character qualities (or the lack of them) have on these two different relationships? Describe each relationship in your journal.

◆ READ

Read pages 41-46 of *Keeping Family Ties From Pulling Strings*. (You can download this PDF from this week's study on the Loving People website www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org.) This is a chapter from the book *Relationships* by the Christian counselors Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott. (Stop at *Exercise 5: How Healthy is Your Home?*)

◆ REFLECT

1) In this chapter Leslie describes the traumatic experience she had when she was just five years old, and how it still impacted her as an adult many years later—without her even realizing it! It took her a long conversation with her husband, Les, to figure it out. Have you ever had a similar realization about some experience in your past? If so, explain.

2) In this chapter, the Parrotts write,

No other relationships shapes who we are more than our family. Most of what we think, feel, say, and do is in response to the home we grew up in. On a conscious level, we either buy into or reject the lessons learned from our family. And on an unconscious level, through a kind of osmosis, we absorb ways of thinking, feeling, and being. Either way, we can't escape its influence...

Our family is like a classroom where we learn the skills and knowledge that will one day enable us to live outside of it. Our families teach us to trust or distrust the people around us, to speak up or stay quiet in a social setting, to give or to take. They teach us what kinds of feelings are acceptable, appropriate, and tolerable. ...Our family sets the pattern for all other relationships.

- *Relationships*, p. 43, excerpts

What are two or three *unconscious* lessons (good or bad) you picked up from your family growing up?

2) Spend some time praying and processing what you're learning. Ask the Lord to show you if there are any lessons you picked up from your family of origin that are holding you back in your relationships today.

DAY FIVE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:9-14
- ◆ **READ:** *Keeping Family Ties From Pulling Strings*, pgs. 47-53 (PDF)
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the Three R's: Rules, Roles, and Relationships

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will continue our study of **Colossians 3:1-14** by focusing on **Colossians 3:9-14**. Before you get started today, take a couple minutes and ask God to speak to you through today's study. Then **read Colossians 3:9-14** in the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB). (You can find this on YouVersion.) Then answer the following questions:

- 1) Look back at Colossians 3:13. What does this verse teach about what we should expect in our relationships with others—even with other believers? Does this surprise you? How do you feel about this?
- 2) Colossians 3:14 summarizes everything Paul has written so far in Colossians 3:1-13. How would you paraphrase this verse?

◆ READ

Read pages 47-53 in *Keeping Family Ties From Pulling Strings*, by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott. (Stop at *Exercise 7: Lessons Learned From Mom and Dad.*)

◆ REFLECT

- 1) In this section, the Parrot's describe the "Three R's" that every family teaches: *Rules, Roles, and Relationships*. Read their bulleted list of examples on page 49. Were any of these "rules" in force in your family? Can you think of any other rules in your family (spoken or unspoken) not on this list?
- 2) In this chapter, the Parrots write,

Perhaps the most powerful method our family has of teaching relationship lessons is by example... There's really no way around it. We learn how to feel, how to think, and how to act by observing others in our home. And we learn relationship skills that will either help or hinder our relationships we have as adults...

Every one of us grew up in a home where ways of relating were modeled. We absorbed ways of expressing affection and anger, of talking and listening, of burying conflict or resolving it. In short, we absorbed ways of interacting.

-Relationships, p. 51,52 excerpts

What did you learn about expressing affection or anger from your family?

What did you learn about talking and listening?

What did you learn about burying conflict or resolving it?

3) On page 98 of *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Audible 3:10:15-3:12:12), Peter Scazzero lists 13 questions to help us think through our past and how it might be affecting the way we approach our relationships today. Do any of these questions speak to you or raise issues you may need to pray through in the future? Jot down any initial insights you have in your journal.

4) Take a few minutes and review your journal entries for this week. What are one or two of your most important learnings from this week's study?

WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the third message in this series (*Character... The Key Ingredient*), take a few minutes and answer the following questions:

- 1) What was your favorite lesson, principle, or insight from this weekend's message—and why?

- 2) This weekend we learned that character is the secret ingredient of great relationships. Can you think of any relationship in your life where an important character decision played a key role in the success or failure of the relationship?

- 3) This weekend, Pastor Michael highlighted three essential character qualities for healthy relationships: integrity, courage, and humility. Which of these would you rate as your strongest, and why? Which of these is your weakest? How have these character qualities (or the lack of them) impacted your relationships in both positive and negative ways?

