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INTENTIONAL REAL-ATIONSHIPS

Heard this before? "*Why can't we all just get along?*" Or "*If you all would just agree with me, we'd get along fine.*" Hmm. Real people are messy, and so are our relationships. But as someone has well said, God declares it "**a mess worth making.**"

Visualize a teeter-totter on the playground, representing the extremes of personal relationships. Left to your own sinful selfishness, you move toward one unhealthy end or the other of that continuum. Either toward "immersion" and getting overly involved with others, or toward "isolation" and withdrawing from others. Neither extreme results in healthy relationships. Someone must intervene.

That's what God has done. He interferes with your sin. Because He created you in His image FOR relationship, first with Himself and then with one another. He created the first man and woman, then conducted the first marriage. And He continued to love these unlovable people, who brought forth more messy disobedient people who set about hurting one another all the more, in sinful selfishness.

But God intervenes. 1 John 4:10 says "***in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to pay for our sins.***" Verse 19 says "***We love because He first loved us.***" Verse 7 says "***Love one another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God.***"

This is REAL love. Not just emotional love. True love is self-sacrificing. It does what is best for the other person, regardless of cost, whether deserved or not. We're too selfish to do that on our own. But when you receive the new life of Christ, by trusting Him as your Lord and Savior, you're a new creation. He paid the penalty and sets you FREE from your sin and your selfishness. Re-created in His image, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, you can truly love God and others. This remarkable transformation of real, messy people by the real Savior - CHANGES you and all of your relationships.

God describes His redeemed people as "***living stones***" who are being built up as a spiritual temple for spiritual sacrifices offered to God (1 Peter 2:5). And in Jesus He re-creates you to offer your own self as "***living sacrifices***" by being TRANSFORMED by the "*renewal of your mind.*" That's real people who learn to think differently about Jesus, yourself, and others. This means REAL relationships. And it's all part of God's blueprint for His people - as He builds a beautiful living church out of messy real people.

Romans 15:2 says "***Let each of us please his neighbor for his good.***" Okay. How? The next verse answers: "**BECAUSE CHRIST**" and explains: "***For whatever was written in former days was written for OUR instruction, that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures WE might have hope.***" That's good news! We can learn from the mistakes of others, all recorded in the Bible. And they're all doozies. But we see how God works through their messy human-ness. We can see how we too can trust and obey, and how God can bring about good things from the mess we make.

The next verse says "***May the God of endurance and encouragement grant YOU to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together YOU may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.***" That mouthful is the opposite of the mess we make by ourselves. That's God at work, with living stones and living sacrifices, building something that praises Him. That's God intervening. No lone ranger Christians here. Together, real people living real lives - becoming more like Jesus - THROUGH the frustrations and relationships of real life.

Jesus sums up His commandments like this: "***Love God with your whole being - all your heart and mind and will***" and then you can "***love your neighbor as yourself***" (Mark 12:30). God expects His children to be like Him and love like Him - and He gives the power of the Holy Spirit to do so.

That's why there's real hope for real relationships. Like God, get intentional about it. Start all over - by being re-born in Jesus. Then re-learn what it means to love Him, yourself, and one another. And live it out. The real life of Jesus lived out through you, transforming you into the real person He intends you to be.

Really loving Him. Really loving one another. REALLY. And that's really good news!