

This Sunday, in part two of our series *The Vow*, Steve asked the question: "Have you ever been in a romantic relationship with someone who is completely opposite to you?" I'm sure the answer to the question is a resounding "yes!" for many of us.

In the early days of a relationship, opposites usually attract, but in later years it often becomes a case of opposites attack! The very things that initially attracted us become the things that cause the irritation: He was so laid back, now he's lazy... She was so organised, now she's controlling...

The first mention of male and female in the Bible speaks to difference and sameness: *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:27. Difference as in male and female. (God made the differences). And sameness in that both male and female were made in the image of God. There are aspects of both men and women which reflect the image of God and this is one of the biggest reasons there should be mutual respect between the genders.

The first couple to give us an example of this were Adam and Eve. Adam expressed joy when God created Eve: *The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken out of man.'* Genesis 2:23. However, a few chapters later he's willing to throw Eve under a bus after God seeks them out when they disobey Him by eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil: *The man said, 'The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'* Genesis 3:12.

This brings us to our vow for the week: I promise to **persevere** in understanding differences while celebrating uniqueness.

This is not just a message for couples - it's relevant to single adults, people who are dating, and married couples. To live emotionally healthy lives requires perseverance. The Bible celebrates and encourages perseverance.

Differences naturally make us focus on ourselves rather than looking for the gold in others. If we are not students of ourselves, it becomes difficult to understand others. There are many different tools used in counselling, psychology and psychiatry which can help us understand ourselves better. And that helps us understand others. (Note: you can't allow any one of these tools to completely - just like the facets of a diamond, there are different aspects to each of us.)

Persevering in understanding ourselves

On Sunday we looked at a model that focuses on six needs, in order to try and persevere in understanding ourselves better. Every basic need of the soul finds its starting fulfilment in Christ!

SURVIVAL NEEDS:

1. Certainty

The need we have to:

- Know what's coming next
- Feel like we are in control
- Safety and security

Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my *lot secure*. Psalm 16:6.

2. Variety (uncertainty)

The need we have to:

- have change
- see new things/places/people.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19.

3. Significance

The need we have to:

- know that who we are is valuable/unique/important
- And that what we do is valuable or important

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10.

4. Connection

The need we have to:

- feel connected to others (both near and far).

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5.

FULFILMENT NEEDS:

5. Growth

- We were designed to need to grow (positive change) in body, soul and spirit.

- Negative change = shrinking

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:16.

6. Contribution

The need to:

- feel that my life is able to contribute to a higher cause/be part of something greater than me. (Even gangsters have this need!)

...remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35.

Figuring all of this out is a big part of how our relationships with each other outwork themselves.

On a relational level, we don't all have the same size buckets in each area! This can cause misunderstandings in relationships. For example, one partner in a relationship may have a 20l 'variety' bucket where the other partner has a 5l 'variety' bucket. The difference starts to play out when the 5l bucket is at capacity, but the 20l bucket is only 25% full!

In Ephesians 4:1-2 Paul writes: *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

This is not specifically a 'relationship' verse, but it is challenging. This doesn't mean we don't express our needs or feelings; we don't pretend that our needs don't exist, but in a healthy relationship we ask these questions:

1. What are my spouse's needs and how can I meet them better?
2. What are my needs and how can my spouse meet them better?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

VOW No. 2 - The Vow of Perseverance:

I promise to persevere in understanding differences while celebrating uniqueness.

Icebreaker (choose one):

- What has been the biggest obstacle you've overcome in your life or career?
- What's something crazy you've done for love?

Questions for Groups (choose 2 or 3):

1. In terms of the six buckets Steve spoke about on Sunday, which is your biggest bucket and which is your smallest bucket?
2. Why is it important to celebrate uniqueness and figure out differences in the way that we are wired?

Read Romans 5:3-5

3. Have you ever had an experience where you feel like the fact that you persevered through a situation built character and hope?
4. It is important to live a life of perseverance so that when things get difficult and challenging, we won't be tempted to pack things in. What daily habits have you built that keep you going through challenging times?
5. How would more perseverance improve your relationships? What part does having a 'quitting' attitude play in your relationships with your spouse, friends, coworkers, and family?

PRAYER POINT

Pray for each other, for endurance, understanding, humility and grace in our relationships with our spouses, family, friends and coworkers.

ACTION POINT

- If you are married, ask your spouse what makes them feel loved, then commit to doing at least one thing on their list.
- If you are single, write down three things that "fill your buckets", then commit to doing one of them this week.