



THINKING ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS: TIME, LOVE, SEXUALITY, FORGIVENESS AND MONEY

Christian vocation

In the Gospels Jesus calls people to follow him and to forms of service, helping others and working within our relationships for the building up of his kingdom. Christians believe the risen Christ calls people to service today! The word 'vocation' means a call and that can take many different forms. All Christians try to live out their faith in their workplace and daily lives. But some Christians fulfil their vocation and earn their living mainly through their daily work. Some Christians earn their living through their daily work to support their calling to ministry in other ways (as St Paul made tents to support himself – see Acts 18.3). Discovering your vocation at different periods of your life is an important part of being a disciple. We do this in the context of the situation we are already a part of and seek to take others with us on that journey, serving the Lord and others.

You and yours

The relationships in our lives bring us the deepest joy. They can also bring us the deepest pain we will ever know. These joys and pains come through being a friend, a wife, a husband, a partner, a child or a parent. As Christ begins to change our lives and as we learn more about living His way, so our relationships should begin to change as well. At the heart of Christian relationships is our understanding of what love is and how to forgive.

We can mean different things when we use the word love. The Christian model for love in all our relationships is Jesus and his teaching. Paul, in his letters sums up the new understanding of love he has come to in Jesus in his famous chapter in his first letter to the Christian church in Corinth:

'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' (1 Corinthians 13. 4-8)

Different Relationships

God loves all things He has made and that includes you! Christians believe that everyone is inherently good and that is always a good place to start when thinking about relationships. Within society today there are a myriad of different types of relationships and families and this can seem confusing. The Bible offers a similar mix of examples, blessed by God. These mirror the covenant nature of God's love for us, revealed through the bible and fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ who recognised that not all relationships take the form of marriage.

Inclusivity at St Mary's Church, Thorpe

We recognise that not all Christians take a progressive view of relationships, but we do because we see that God loves us and desires us to find deep happiness in the various friendships we hold, including the love of another person to form a committed and faithful relationship. The Church of England is committed to working with and supporting the diversity of relationships in every community and at a national level. We believe the family is an important part of God's plan for a healthy society.

Just about every social policy issue has an impact on families. It's part of our witness to Christ, to keep that impact in focus. Christians more widely, and therefore the Church of England, has its own positions and its own debates and differences about what's OK in love and family life. Here at St Mary's our primary concern is to support all families, the best way we can. We will also offer services of blessing for couples where one party has been married before, if we are unable to offer a Marriage after Divorce.

Sexual orientation and relationships

The call of the Gospel demands that we all listen, speak and act with integrity, self-discipline and grace, acknowledging that as yet our knowledge and understanding are partial. The Bishops in the Church of England recognise that there is a range of reactions to the introduction of same sex marriage and mirroring wider society, they are not all in agreement about every aspect of the Church's response. However, they have re-affirmed their view of the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman, which remains unchanged, even though it is recognised that many men and women seek to live faithful Christian lives, in same sex relationships. Further study is underway, as General Synod (the decision-making body within the Church) continues to reflect, pray and discern God's will for the future.

Although we are not permitted to offer formal services of Marriage or Blessing between couples of the same sex, at St Mary's we will pray with LGBTI couples and do welcome all into the life and worship of our church family and will do all we can to walk with people in their relationships because we believe Jesus loves and redeems us all, equally. There is always a warm welcome for all at St Mary's. We are committed to be a place where all feel safe, welcomed and loved as the people they are, all made in God's image. As we look to support the LGBTI community in our parish, we will do all we can as a church community to foster a wider debate within the Church of England as we seek the fully inclusive love of Jesus to be made known to all. We also pray for the Archbishop's Council as they seek to discover a new inclusivity for all within the Church, that is the body of Christ.

Building good relationships

Some things build good relationships between people, whether in friendship, marriage or parent-child relationships. These include:

- ❖ quality time spent together;
- ❖ listening to each other;
- ❖ sharing yourself;
- ❖ allowing other people to be themselves;
- ❖ appreciating each other (and using words to do it)
- ❖ Careful listening and respect

But if we are not careful, barriers can form between people for many different reasons.

Obvious examples can include:

- ❖ Pride
- ❖ Unforgiveness
- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Jealousy

Many people come to Christ bearing wounds from relationships that have gone badly wrong. Sometimes, even after you become a Christian, you will sustain serious hurt through relationships. Jesus longs to heal these inner hurts from the past and to set them right. Often, as part of our Christian growth and development, God will allow hurts from the past to come to the surface again so that they can be healed. This process is sometimes known as inner healing.

Our courteous Lord does not want his servants to despair even if they fall frequently and grievously. Our falling does not stop his loving. Peace and love are always at work in us, but we are not always in peace and love. But he wants us this way to realise that he is the foundation of the whole of our life in love and furthermore he is our eternal protector and mighty defender.

Julian of Norwich,
Revelations of Divine Love, chapter 39

At the core of this healing is receiving forgiveness yourself for the wrong you have done and forgiving others who have wronged or hurt you very deeply – even if they don't recognise the pain they have caused. When you forgive someone, you are releasing all the pain and bitterness and anger you have carried for years against that person. You are not saying, 'What so and so did does not matter', and you are not saying, 'What so and so

did was right'. You are saying, 'What so and so did to me was wrong and hurt me very deeply. But in Jesus' name I forgive them anyway,' letting go of that which holds you back from being you and happy.

Forgiveness brings healing and wholeness

To forgive is like cleansing a wound – all the infection goes, and, over the weeks and months, the wound is then able to heal instead of remaining open and festering. The healed failure, the forgiven sin, become the place where Christ's power rests upon us like a tent pitched over our weakness (2 Corinthians 12.9). The thickened scar tissue is stronger than the original, undamaged flesh. Though healed, the soul's wounds are still seen by God, not as wounds but as honourable scars. Being able to forgive others is one thing. Recognising that Jesus longs to forgive us and we therefore need to forgive ourselves also is often challenging but none the less important.

Growing closer to God

Growing as a Christian is about coming to love God more and coming to realize more and more deeply how much God loves you. Just pause to reflect for a moment:

- ❖ Are there any people you realize you need to forgive?
- ❖ How will you go about that?
- ❖ How easy do you find it to believe that God loves you?

Part of our growing closer to God is our commitment to regular worship, and offering our skills, abilities and time to help the local church to go about the day to day tasks that keep us ministering and loving.

First principles of Christian stewardship

Giving of ourselves to others and God includes our commitment of time and financial support. Christians believe that all we have comes from God, who calls us to be good stewards of what we have been given. God is concerned not simply with what we give but how we approach all we have. According to Genesis 1 and 2, our stewardship extends to caring for the whole world:

*Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour and the majesty;
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you,
and of your own do we give you.*

How should we give to support St Mary's?

God has given so much to us and asks us to be as generous in return. As well as the gift of our time to support the family of faith, the New Testament suggests we give financially in proportion to our income, in a regular and disciplined way, in a way that is realistic to the need of the church community, in secret and willingly with joy. God is more concerned about how we give than about how much.

Traditionally, tithing 10% of income was the Old Testament standard of giving. Today the Church of England encourages families to consider a half tithe which is 5% of gross income. For some, even giving half a tithe will be something to work towards or even too much. For others it will be just a beginning, but what matters is our heart intention and our desire to contribute towards the ministry, mission and community of Thorpe and every little bit helps. One very good way of supporting the St Mary's is to set-up a monthly standing order because this enables the church community to plan expenditure and balance the budget. But don't feel pressured. Pray about your giving and talk it over with your family and one of the clergy or church leadership. God is patient with us in this area (as in every other). If the rest of your family are not Christians that will clearly affect your own giving and ability to give freely. And don't forget that if you pay income tax you may be able to gift-aid any donations you make to St Mary's Church and that really helps too.