



BLUEPRINT FOR LIFE

My Relationships Blueprint

Chapter Five

“The things you eat, the place you work, the clothes you wear, the car you drive—all of these *are merely costumes and stage props* for the main event—*relationships*.”

~ Anonymous

The Main Event

Within God’s overall plan for your life, there is an ideal blueprint for how you should conduct your relationships. In fact, you may feel a tension from time to time when your relationships don’t reflect the life you were born to live. God uses that tension to motivate us to cultivate the kinds of relationships He intends for us to have. In this session, you will examine the role relationships will play in realizing your purpose. In addition, you will create goals to give you a definition of success as you interact with other people throughout your life.

You were created for relationships. In the beginning, God created man in order to have fellowship with Him—the first relationship. While Adam was still learning his way around the garden, God created Eve to be his partner, one person with another. And ever since, God has been intensely interested in the relationships between people. Five of the Ten Commandments give instructions about interacting with others. Many of Jesus’ parables revolved around personal relationships and how they should be conducted. Throughout history, most of God’s will for the world has been carried out through the relational activities of people with people. And when it came time for the grand climax of His interaction with man, the medium God chose was a personal relationship—Jesus in the flesh, walking and talking with men and women.

A person can learn to be happy without money. His joy can survive almost any physical condition or career situation. But take away relationships—or the hope thereof—and a person will soon lose his will to live. It’s no coincidence that solitary confinement has earned its place as one of the most-used instruments of torture. Next to food, water, and oxygen, man’s need for relationship ranks as the highest basic necessity.

You can’t create a life blueprint without including a strategy for developing and maintaining the important relationships in your life.

In many ways, this is the most important area of your blueprint. When all is said and done, the strength of your relationships will determine your level of joy at the finish. It's possible to amass wealth and still be miserable. You can achieve every career goal and yet be unfulfilled. You can be the picture of health and still feel empty inside. But rare is the person who reaches old age with a portfolio of rich relationships and doesn't feel utter joy and elation. Naked we come from the womb, and naked we return. But the relationships we encounter along the way are the very currency of eternity.

The things you eat, the clothes you wear, the car you drive... all of these are merely the costumes and stage props for the main event—relationships. Therefore, relationships should be a priority when making your blueprint.

The *priority* of any relationship is determined by the *purpose* it fulfills.

Your Relationship Portfolio

Everyone has a “relationship portfolio.” There are many different types of relationships in your portfolio: spouse, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc. For Christians, the portfolio often contains additional relationships that can play a role in achieving your goals: pastor, mentor, disciples, accountability partners, fellowship groups, etc. Depending on how well these relationships function, they can either support your pursuit of your purpose in life or detract from it.

As you create a blueprint for your relationships, you may conclude that certain key relationships are missing from your life. Likewise, you might decide to scale back on some of the relationships that aren't central to your purpose in life. As a good steward of the time God has given you, you should be intentional about cultivating the right balance of relationships to enable your life purpose—whether that means creating new relationships in key categories where they don't exist yet, or allowing nonessential relationships to expire.

Time and Environments

There are two concepts that are important for cultivating the key relationships in your portfolio: time and environments. All relationships require an investment of time. And all take place in an environment. The amount and quality of each of these components will determine the health of the relationship.

Time: There are many ways to express love to someone. You can buy gifts. You can give compliments. You can give a pat on the back or a heartfelt smile. All of these are valid

expressions of love. But nothing speaks louder to the priority of a relationship than the amount of time you are willing to invest in that person. That's why love has been spelled: T - I - M - E. The depth of a relationship is directly proportional to the time you put into it. A husband can call home, send flowers, mail cards, and make promises. But if he never comes home from work, his wife knows exactly where his priorities lie. In the same way, you can buy expensive toys for your child, or send him to the greatest camps and playgrounds in the world. But if you don't spend an adequate amount of time with him, the relationship will suffer.

Quality of time is important too. When someone feels like a priority, bonds strengthen. When the relationship is short-changed, it suffers. *Which* time you carve out for somebody should fit the priority you give that relationship.

Friendships need time because it allows bonds to develop. And special relationships need time because it expresses love and builds intimacy. Your most important relationships should get top priority when setting goals and making plans.

Environments: *Where you go* can say a lot about *who you're with*. A fast-food lunch is one thing, but dinner at a nice restaurant usually conveys something more about the value of the relationship. Regular, everyday contact and a casual atmosphere can be an important foundation. But special, planned outings can be an opportunity to use strategy to make the relationship what you want it to be. This may not apply to every relationship. And you can't always control it. But when you're thinking of strategies for various relationships, it's definitely something to keep in mind.

Specific Strategies

Each type of relationship will require a different approach. So let's look at a few of them to see what they require, and how you might make them more strategic:

Spouse: Next to your relationship with God, there's no relationship more important than the one with your life partner. The Bible says that a man's wife is like his own flesh. It also calls wives to a level of devotion toward their husbands that is beyond any other human relationship. Your spouse is your first ministry. This relationship is the foundation for all other relationships after it. To the degree that it thrives, your other relationships are free to thrive as well. If there's a deficit in your relationship with your spouse, it will trickle down to affect all the others. If you're going to examine the priorities of your relationships, this is the place to start.

There is something unromantic about the idea of being strategic with a love relationship. An exciting relationship with your spouse involves feelings of emotions and spontaneity. But a



long-term, healthy... thriving relationship requires a certain level of planning. Anyone can fall in love. However, it takes work to stay that way. Do you have a plan for being in love in 10 years... 20... 50? Being strategic doesn't mean taking the spice out of your relationship. It means making sure there's plenty of spice to last the whole way.

So how do you put your wife or husband first? What kinds of things should you consider when making strategies for this area?

Start with time and environments. The calendar doesn't lie. Do the amount and priority of time spent together fit your goals for long-term intimacy? Do you have a strategy for spending quality time with your spouse? Should you cultivate more environments where the relationship will thrive? Do you have regular dates together? Do you have a plan for getting away for the weekend... or longer? As you imagine yourself one day looking back over your life together, what key experiences would you not want to miss? Are there special places you'd like to go? Things you'd like to do? Identify the landmark experiences for your marriage and begin now to make a plan to ensure they happen.

Landmark events are one thing. But the quality of life along the way is even more important. Are there any day-to-day things you should consider? Do you ever have devotional time together? Do you remember to ask, "How was your day?" And do you stop and truly listen when he or she gives the answer? Do you take walks... trips without the kids... unexpected phone calls during the day?

What do you need to do to express your love for your spouse... to make him or her *feel* loved? Do you know how to recognize your spouse's "love language"? Does receiving a gift hit the spot? Or do words of affirmation go much further? Perhaps acts of service that are visible around your household say "I love you" best: unloading the dishwasher, vacuuming the carpet, doing yard work, or taking out the trash.

Are you sensitive to your spouse's needs? Do you have a plan for recognizing ways to serve him or her? What are his or her personal desires? Do you need more romantic gestures? Is the level of physical intimacy where you both want it? Are there chores left undone? Would he or she benefit from a night out with a close friend (other than you)? These are just a few things you can do to meet the personal needs of your spouse.

When you look back on your life together, no relationship will have been more pivotal than that with your spouse. If you're not strategic in this area you very well may be disappointed with the outcome. At the same time, a little planning and a little foresight can not only avoid potential pitfalls, but can also make a good relationship truly great.

Children: The Bible calls children a blessing... an inheritance from the Lord. Your relationships with them should reflect this perspective. But a truly rich relationship with a child takes special insight. A child's communication skills are still developing. He is less likely to tell you when he requires love and attention. He may not even understand his own feelings and needs. Even if he appears outspoken and content, there may be hidden voids below the surface. So it's up to the parent to make sure the relationship is rich and deep.

So how can you make your child feel loved and appreciated? Individual time is a good place to start... a father/daughter date night, a father/son "boy's night," or a special outing with mom. An impromptu day off work to spend together on a bike ride, or a hike can become an indelible, lifetime memory.

Structured activities give opportunities to step into your child's world. Coaching the little league team, or just cheering from the sidelines... attending school programs and piano recitals... time together in Bible study... hobbies shared together... bedtime routines... All of these can help lay a foundation for rewarding relationships. And of course, love should also be communicated in words... letters/cards... notes in his lunch box... and verbal "I love you."

Parents: As an adult, your relationship with your parents can prove to be one of the most rewarding. Or, it can fade and slip by without your realizing it. Even if you feel pain or anger, you are commanded to honor them. While you're busy building a career and raising a family of your own, you need to be proactive about spending time and expressing love to your parents. A few suggestions include: vacations together... Sunday dinners... frequent phone calls... letters/cards... gifts... impromptu visits... time alone together (with and without the grandchildren)... and shared hobbies like sports, shopping, sewing, or golf. And of course, now is the time to say, "I love you."

Friends: Friendships are important for everyone. From constructive friendships like mentors or accountability partners to those that are just plain fun. Some people are naturally relational and never lack company. Others will have to work at it. If you tend to have plenty of friends, the focus will be on selecting your friendships wisely and making sure they have purpose. If you tend to keep to yourself, you may need to focus on stepping out and developing the right kinds of friendships. Either way, you need to be strategic and choose relationships that are vital to your mission and overall goals. If you don't, you'll simply drift.

Friendships tend to form around common interests, or comfort zones. We are naturally pulled toward environments and people where we feel accepted. As a result, we can end up in relationships that may serve an emotional need or longing, but are not necessarily strategic to

our mission statement. The challenge is to begin considering the purpose of the relationships that you allow into your life... to begin intentionally pursuing relationships that support your life purpose, and avoiding those that don't.

So, are your friendships fulfilling and fun? Are they constructive? Being selective doesn't mean you can't have *any* casual friendships that don't meet a specific goal. This doesn't mean you have to get rid of all your friends and start over. But you may want to make some tough decisions about how you spend your time. Some people will need to eliminate some relationships completely—not to be mean or unfriendly—but to serve a greater goal. This may require doing some things that feel awkward or unnatural. But the end goal is to develop the types of relationships that will help you to fulfill your mission and purpose. If you begin to analyze and evaluate relationships based on their purpose, you'll find that your overall life experience is more rewarding.

The Relationships You Were *Born to Discover*

Remember, God has an ideal plan for each and every relationship in your life. As we gain wisdom about relationships from Scripture, we can begin to develop a blueprint that will give us guidance for cultivating the relationships we are called to experience in our lives. In the Practical Application section, you will find several exercises to develop personalized strategies for making sure the relationships in your life reflect the blueprint for your life.

Drive-Time *Audio*

This week, listen to audio message 5 by Dennis Rainey, on the Drive-Time Audio CD.

Practical Application Exercise – *My Relationships Blueprint*

Take out the booklet *My Personal Blueprint* and complete the Relationships Blueprint section as well as the *Life Cards* for your Relationships.

Bible *Study* and Group *Discussion* Questions

After reading the narrative for Chapter 5, listening to the audio message by Dennis Rainey, and completing the practical application sections, answer the following questions. Be prepared to discuss your answers with the group at the next meeting.

1. Read Ephesians 5:22-33

What is Paul's instruction to husbands and wives in these verses?

What do you think the scripture means when it says in verse 31, "and the two shall become *one flesh*"?

List below practical ways your relationship can become as *one flesh* with your spouse.

2. Read Psalm 127:3-5

What do these verses say about the precious value of children?

3. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4

What do these verses command us to do for our children?

In what ways can we ensure our children are being taught God's word and nurtured in the ways of the Lord?

4. Read Exodus 20:12

How can you prioritize your relationship with your parents at this point in your life?

5. Read Proverbs 13:20 and II Corinthians 6:14

What do these verses say about how we should choose our friends?

6. Have you ever thought about the need for relationships to have a purpose? Explain.

7. Rank the different relationships listed in order of priority. Discuss with the group why you chose the priority you did. *Friends, Children, God, Spouse, Parents*

8. What strategies can you employ in your *Blueprint For Life* to maintain proper relationship priorities? Discuss these with the group. (Remember—Time and Environments are the two key elements to for cultivating and maintaining your key relationships)



Recommended Resources

FamilyLife, a division of Campus Crusade for Christ and a ministry partner of *Blueprint for Life*, maintains a comprehensive offering of conferences and resources to assist in every aspect of developing and maintaining healthy relationships. For additional resources related to marriage, parenting, singles, and life issues, please visit www.familylife.com.