



Check the Gauges

Part 4 – The Relational Gauge

Shay Robbins

It is football season and the Robbins family, for many years, have been holding off on all the sports. We've got six kids and we've had older friends saying, "The day is coming when your life is about to explode." So, we've been holding off just as long as we can, strategically, just to keep investing in our core family unit. This year, we pulled the plug. Over the last two days, we've had cross country, volleyball, football, and soccer. We've had to employ the grandparents to help cover all the kids and get them to their games. So, our life and our relational gauge looks a little different. It's all over the place. Our life is an emotional roller coaster, and a relational one at that.

So, when I got assigned this message, I have to tell you, as I've dug in and started studying and considering, I am right there with you. The Robbins family is checking the gauges. I'm so thankful that we are walking through this process as a church, it's healthy. And the relational gauge obviously is a super important one.

I have a question I want to kick off our conversation with. Are you lonely, relationally, or overwhelmed, or both? So, loneliness... if you look this up on the internet... I was looking for statistics and I'm always weary with statistics because you can pretty much find anything that you want if you want a desired outcome. But as I was looking at the different statistics in regard to loneliness in the United States, all the charts and graphs looked the same. This one happens to be a survey of 10,000 US adults, and it was taken in 2019, so this is actually pre-pandemic information.

It says, 61% of all US adults reported feeling lonely, which is up 7% from last year. Gen Z, our young adults, are at 79%. Millennials are at 71% feel lonely and 50% of boomers. As you can imagine, going through the pandemic did not help our case with loneliness, but loneliness is an issue. Or on the other hand, what I would call being relationally overwhelmed. What does that look like. It looks a little bit like this. You guys probably know the feeling. These actually represent relationships (social media). We know it's not the truest form of relationship, but that is a reality. I've spent most of my career working with teenagers and I'm watching teenagers experience relational pressure that I never had to. In fact, when I was a kid, many of you experienced the same thing, it doesn't matter what relational tension I faced at school, whether being bullied or picked on or lonely at a new school, not getting any playing time, or all of those emotional battles, when I came home, for those of us who even had a decent family life, you come home and it was a place of peace, rest, shelter, protection.

The kids that are growing up with phones, their social pressures may never turn off. They wake up with those social pressures and they go to bed with those social pressures. We all kind of know these alerts, these red notification dots on the social media apps. They have a strange power, do they not? Some of you are weirdly comfortable with 7,348 emails in your inbox. The rest of us feel like we need to check all of these to get that red dot off of there all the time. And you've got teenagers that are growing up under that weight of pressure. That's a lot of pressure that never lets up. Guess what happens to the relational gauges. They all get out wack. And what's even more fascinating is you can be both lonely and relationally overwhelmed at the same time. In fact, the two often go hand in hand because all of these relationships are not meeting the true desire for relationship that we've been wired with.

That's where I want to start. How were we wired? What's the biblical foundation of relationships, and we are going to springboard off of that. I want to go to Genesis 1: 26. We are going to talk about how God has designed us for relationships from the very beginning. So, even in the creation account, right off the bat, Genesis 1: 26 says, **26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."** God said, "Let us make man in *our* image." It's pointing to the triune God, the Trinity, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God, operating in relationship. And he designed us after himself. He said, "Let us make them in our image. Made for relationships. As you go through the scripture and you see the Trinity come to life, you see.

Go to Matthew 4, when Jesus was baptized. His cousin, John, baptized him and when he comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit lands on Jesus in the form of a dove, and then the Father God's voice boomed out of the heavens, **"This is my son in whom I am well pleased.** Relationship.

And then you go the end of the Book of Matthews when Jesus gives his final charge and the Great Commission. He said, go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. relationship.

You see in John 1, ***In the beginning was the Word... Speaking of Jesus. ...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*** Jesus is there with God and the spirit, working in unison in relationship.

Colossians 1: 17 – Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes, **17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.** Jesus was involved in the creation of relationships.

Then, right off the bat, the first human relationship. Then the Lord God said "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." It's not good to be alone. My wife wakes up every morning and she goes to each one of her kids and she said, "Come get your 20 seconds of physical touch." Some Instagram post told us that, so we're out there just hugging away to get our physical touch. We are designed for it.

In John 15: 12, Jesus says, **"This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.** You can't have love without relationship. Love has to land on something.

Ephesians 4: 15 -16, Paul is instructing the Church at Ephesus how the body of Christ is to work together. He says, **15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 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.** He uses the analogy of the human physical body in order for the human physical body to function in it's highest order, every single part is necessary. Every ligament, tendon, all parts of the skeletal structure, your nerves, your brain synapsis, your cellular structure, everything is required for the body to work in harmony. So, it is with the body of Christ. Everyone who is a part of this body is necessary and what Paul is establishing is that we use our gifts together to grow in all aspects in Jesus. In other words, simply put, growth happens in community, in relationship.

If we are going to talk about relationships, we're going to operate with the understanding that relationships are powerful, that they have influence. As we head off into this conversation, we will recognize that those close to you influence you. So, it's important who you choose. Who do you choose, who do you not choose?

Interestingly, when we talk about influence, if I were to call one of these young men up to the front of the stage and ask them if it would be easier for me to pull them up on stage or for them to pull me down off the stage, which one would be easier? It's easier to pull someone down than it is to lift someone up. With that simple principle in place, it's important who we choose.

The scripture tells us a ton about the kind of people we should place in our life. We are just going to scratch the surface, but Proverbs is chocked full of instruction on your relationships.

Proverbs 12: 26 - **The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.** I always define that. Righteous means "Right in the eyes of God." So, in other words, it's someone who walks in a relationship with Christ. That's where we get our righteousness. Those kinds of people are a guide to their neighbors. They are an influence that lifts people up. But the way of the wicked leads them astray. That tells me that we need to be cautious with our relationships.

Proverbs 18: 24 – **A person of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.** We could actually have too many friends to where we become emotionally stretched thin, relationally exhausted because we're trying to meet the needs of all these people in our life. Well, it says that the true quality of a friend is the one that sticks closer than a brother. That's like family.

Proverbs 17: 17 – **A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.** This does not mean that brothers are allowed to fight with each other. A brother born for adversity is like going to war together. If you are in a battle, "I'm beside you. I'm with you." That's a true friendship.

Some of you might be stressed out relationally because you have too many VDP's (Very Draining Person) in your life and not enough VIP's (Very Inspiring Person). So, my question for you is how do we best prioritize our time for those who matter most? This might be the most important question that we answer today. How do you do that? Well, in just about every conversation, when we ask questions about our faith and our life in this church, you're always going to hear the same thing. "Let's look to Jesus as our model and our example of how we carry about ourselves in healthy relationships."

Well, what did Jesus do? As you read through the scripture and you see that the story line of Jesus' life, one of the headlines:

- 1. He loves everybody.** In fact, he died for the sins of the whole world. He gave his life for the whole world. He loves everybody.
- 2. He trained 120.** Church history tells us there were about 120 followers that followed him around and participated in his ministry, from city to city.
- 3. He disciplined 12.** There were 12 that were like family. They were in the room together.
- 4. He mentored 3** Peter, James and John got special access to Jesus. I believe the reason he did that was because he had placed a special call of influence in their life and Jesus knew he needed to invest in these three men because they were going to be the most significant leaders in the spread of his church.

Now, what's fascinating to me about this is Jesus, being fully God, had the miraculous capacity to love any number of people. But when he took on human flesh, he also took on some of our human limitations so that he could be an example to us. You look at Jesus' life and it's amazing how he limited himself relationally so that he could go deep and prepare a few really well. He did that on purpose. He wanted to show us, with our human limitations, what it looks like to live in a relationally healthy way.

You and your family need a target to aim for as you're processing through this. I love this series because it helps us to be introspective. To hold up a mirror in front of our lives and to humbly ask God, "Lord, reveal to me the areas in my life that are unhealthy, and help me grow in those ways that my influence on the world around me would be multiplied.

So, in this relational conversation, I want to give you a target. Do we have any archers out there? It's officially Missouri Bow Hunting Season. And some of us are really fired up about it. At the beginning of Bow Season or before it, if you are more disciplined than I am, you pull out your bow and you start firing those arrows. You get your pattern dialed in. You've got a target to aim for and you're discipline to hit the bull's eye. Well, our relational bull's eye looks like this. **Obviously, we place Jesus relationally at the center.** He is the bull's eye target for your relationships. It's where you start every single day. He is the source of life.

Then, **moving just outside the bull's eye**, are those people that are most important to you. It's your marriage, your family, your loyal friends, your core people.

Then **outside that, the next ring**, you've got good friends and then **community**. Community is where I see the church body, with the core friends inside of that. These are all positive influences, all positive relationships. Relationships that actually put fuel in your tank rather than take fuel out of it.

The next one around this is **possibilities**. This is an interesting zone because there might be some VIP's or VDP's that need to shift places. There are also seasons of life where friends come and go, or they move in and out of your life. That's healthy and that's okay. You don't have to continue to be everything to everybody where you walk in some of these core relationships for a whole life. Some you do, others, you don't, but these are possibilities. They can either be very inspiring people or they can be very draining people, and we've got to be discerning in this part of the target.

Finally, there's the **danger zone**. This is the arrow that goes over the back of your 12-point buck. It's devastating. And on the outside of your target, we're to beware of toxic relationships. Now, what do you do if your very draining people are your children. You're stuck with them.

We've had series in the past that have covered these toxic relationships, and we don't have the time to dive down those rabbit holes and how to handle all of the complexities of those toxic relationships, but the important thing to know is they're not on your target. They need to be off the target. And what I want you to think about is if I gave you 12 arrows, where would your arrows land on this target currently. As an archer, when you pull out your bow first thing in the season and you start shooting, your pattern or your grouping is spread out, and you need to make adjustments. You need to tighten up your sights, you need to get your breathing right, you need to get your elbow high, you need to find your resting place, and you begin to tighten your pattern until you get to the point where you're on target.

That's what we get to do as we self-examine. We look at our relationships and recognize our pattern right now is all over the place. We've got none that are placed on the bull's eye right now and they're scattered all over the target. Sometimes, when we're led down a path of self-reflection, we can feel discouraged, like we are so far behind or just reached the point of apathy where we feel like we want to give up. I want to encourage you. Relationships with God's grace can get better in a hurry. In fact, if your pattern is all spread out here, and sitting here today, you realize there are people that your gauge, relationally, is unhealthy, and it's because you don't have enough arrows in the center of this target.

When we do self-reflection, one of our most precious commodities is humility. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he will lift you up. When we have the humility to recognize that we are off target, we can change the trajectory of our relational life today. And it might sound a little something like this with a loved one, "Son, Daughter, Wife, best friend, grandma, "I recognize today that my arrows have scattered about, and my relational gauge is off right now because I haven't been spending enough time with you. Will you please forgive me? I'll do you one better, Can I take you on a date tonight." "Can I take you on a camping trip next weekend?" "Can we go on a walk tonight?" "Can I take you up to the Chief's game?" You can still make it.

I think sometimes, relationally, we make it harder than it is and it is typically just pride standing in the way. If you want relational health, you're going to have to humble yourself and take some steps to rearrange your pattern. So, just as an example, the Robbins have a target. Our target is what we call the Robbins Family Values. We have 10 because we can't agree on six. We established these values years ago between husband and wife and have adopted them with our kids. We've got a big chalkboard in our living room. If you've ever been over, you've seen the Robbins Family Values. Most breakfasts in the morning when Dad is making toast or cooking some eggs, we're going through one family value with the kids.

One of our favorite family values... and we do this in the morning so we can set the culture in our home. So, we're focused on our target which is "Robbins stick together." We always go to Ecclesiastes 4: 9 - 12.

I'll be there at the breakfast table, and I'll say the kids,
I say, "Two are better than one!"

And they will respond, "Because they have a good return for their labor."

I say, "When one falls down."

They say, "The other one lifts him up."

I say, "A cord of three strands."

They say, "It's not easily broken."

I say, "A cord of eight strands!"

They say, "Can never be broken!"

We do that because we have a target as a family. We are convincing our kids from a very young age. Yes, it's indoctrination. We're convincing them that we are our favorite people. And if you can't get along with your siblings, you're sure not hanging out with your friends. Because Robbins stick together. That's our target.

So, based off that target, we make decisions. We make decisions and, often times, these decision mean we are saying no to good things so that we can say yes to the best things. Right now, we are in a season where we've got all these sports going on, but, strategically, as a family, we made a decision that we're going to do the fall through mid-October, and then we are not going to do any winter sports. They would love to do them and would probably be great at them and we'd have fun doing it, but it's too much. We need to pump the breaks as a family. We need to be together. We need dinner together every night. We want that.

I had such a cool conversation with my son. we were at Tequillas in Kimberling City. I wasn't drinking tequillas, I was eating it. It was actually the Special De La Casa. I like to trade up the chicken for steak. We're sitting there eating the Special De La Casa and I was telling the kids... I think I had three kids with me. I was telling them that Mom and Dad are a little bit nervous about this fall because of how busy our schedule will be. They asked why. I said "Business can pull families apart. Even good things." Notch, my ten-year-old, said, "Dad, if that ever happens, you'd pull us out."

Our family is more important than our sports, more important than our activities, more important than business, work, whatever. Our target is those precious people that are most important to us.

So, let's read this Ecclesiastes passage together.

⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:

¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

The purpose of our whole *Check the Gauges* series is that we might be in a healthy place where we can transition from inward reflection to outward influence. The healthier we are, the more impact we can have on the world around us.

I want to shift our focus and answer the question with just a couple of bullet points.

How to be a VIP (Very Inspiring person) What does that look like for us?

1. Ask questions and seek understanding. We can sit around and talk sports and politics all day long, but if we never get down to our feelings, we're not meeting a relational need. Playing a round of golf greets chemistry. It's fun, it's a good way to build relationships. That's healthy but there is another level of desired relationship and that is to be known on a deep level. It's going to require that you ask intentional questions. "Tell me about the hardest thing in our life right now." "What's draining you the most?" "What's bringing the most joy?" "What's the most energizing thing in your family right now?" "Tell me about your relationship with your dad. What's that like?"

When we ask these questions, we invite someone in to a real relationship, to truly be known on a deep level. That's the first step in being a very inspiring person.

2. Intentionally speak life into people through encouragement. I'm such a believer in the power of encouraging words. Your words matter. And you can actually wield encouraging words as much as you choose to. There are some people that may be gifted in the way of encouragement, but we all have that tool in our toolbox. And you can become more skilled and more intentional with it to the extent that you choose.

3. Bring joy to the relationship. Some of you have been blessed with the gift of being critically natured. Some of your critical thoughts and your guarding nature are very valuable. They can be highly influential in protecting your family or building a business, or creating a system. Those are valuable, but if all you bring to a relationship is criticism, you're going to be a very draining person. Bring joy to the relationship. Laugh. Take yourself lightly. Enjoy. Be full of Gratitude for the good blessings in life. When you're with people like that, it's like a magnet. You want to be with them and then you want to go with them. Their energy and their passion for life are uplifting forces. You can be that.

4. Endure suffering and sadness with loved ones. Ted and I were in a text conversation this week, talking about how there is both so much joy and so much difficulty in life all at the same time. And the best friends are the ones that rally to your side when you're hurting. I think sometimes when people are walking through hardship, our fleshly nature is to kind of walk around them, to skirt around that hardship and to not enter in, maybe thinking it's just their private thing and we're going to let them deal with it. That's not what the scripture says about hardships. It says a brother is born for adversity. Those are the best friends in life that rally to your side when you need them the most.

5. don't allow your relationships to be one sided. This is a really good self-reflection. In your relationships, who is doing most of the question asking and most of the talking? You want to be in a mutual relationship. Granted, there are relationships where you have an authority or someone you respect or a mentor, somebody you go to for wisdom and perhaps the conversation is often focused on

you. That doesn't mean that person doesn't have emotional or relational needs too. You can turn to them and with intentional gratitude say, "Listen, you are doing so much for me and I just want to thank you. You are so wise and so skilled, and it is helping me along my way, can I buy your lunch today?" Just that 30 seconds can put fuel in the relational tank of somebody who is investing in you. Don't allow your relationship to be one sided.

6. Leave people better than how you found them. One of the people I look up to the most is a guy named Ward Weebie. His pursuit in every relational interaction is to leave that person closer to Jesus than when he found them. Every conversation – his wife, his boys over the phone, interaction with a cashier or waitress – that is his pursuit. I think that ought to be ours as well, relationally. That's what a very inspiring person does. They move people closer to Jesus. And we have that capacity for influence.

Let me close this way. I want to just reiterate that the origin of relationships come from God. He created them because he loves them. He created us to be in relationship. He did because he wants us to experience that love through those relationships. They all work together. Perhaps your relationship with God today is a little bit fractured. Perhaps your pattern is spread out and you realize *I don't think I have a single arrow on the bull's eye*. I'm going to come back to that humility factor. You are one humble conversation away from being back in that intimate relationship with God. You don't need to get cleaned up. You don't need to get your act together. He just wants you right where you're at. And he will happily help you along your way. God loves you and he wants a relationship with you today, and it's available to you.

Father, we come to you today. I just want to pray over our church. I want to pray, God, that you would help us to walk in healthy relationship. I want to pray for the humility and the conviction to take active steps towards repairing and making healthy relationships, especially honoring those who deserve the most of our attention. I want to pray that you would fill our tank and that you would put our relational gauge on full. Help us and lead us to that place.

We pray in the mighty name of Jesus, amen.