



Real Life Relationships!
How do we relate in love with those we disciple?



Francis Chan was the founder and pastor of one of the fastest growing mega churches in southern California. Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, California, was drawing around 5,000 people and growing in 2010.

A teen that was a gang member got saved, baptized, and joined the church. After a few months, he stopped coming. Francis tells the story this way. "One of my friends asked him, 'Hey, how come you're not at Cornerstone anymore?' He said...

"I didn't understand church. When I was baptized, I thought that was going to be being jumped into the gang where it's like 24/7 they're my family, because I didn't know it was just some where we attend on Sundays."

The teen went on to tell this fellow he must have been wrong for expecting this from the church. When Francis heard this, he told his friend that the kid had it right and that his church had it wrong.

When Chan heard that, he said it made him sick.

"That makes me so sick that the gangs are a better picture of family than the church of Jesus Christ. I can't live with that. ... We're going to do something different."

Welcome to Western Hills. We are about doing something different?

We are about leading everyone into real life relationships with believers for the purpose of discipleship.

A real-life relationship is when you give someone the right to know everything about you and you give them the right to know everything about you.



We believe Real Life Relationships are the rails that the engine of effective discipleship travels on to reach the destination of spiritual maturity.

In this series, we are learning from the life of Jesus what we need to do to form Real Life Relationships with others.

Last Sunday we learned that Jesus had a real-life relationship with God the Father and with His disciples. Jesus did His part to have this relationship by giving them the right to know everything about Him. He was transparent with them about His beliefs, His thoughts, His concerns, His feelings, and His plans.

This week I want us to see something else that Jesus did to have a real-life relationship with God the Father and with His disciples. He was intentional about getting to know them.

How did that happen?

- [What did Jesus do to know God the Father?](#)

Jesus was God so He knew the Father. To know the nature of the Father all He had to do was look at Himself.

But as a human being Jesus had to ask His father meaningful questions and listen to the Father.

Jesus said that He only did and said what He saw the Father doing and saying. (John 5:19; John 12:49)

He received that information by spending time with the Father in prayer and asking questions.

- [What did Jesus do to know His disciples](#)

Jesus knew all men and what was in their hearts.

[John 2:24-25](#)

[24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,](#)

[25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.](#)

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Jesus was given the gifts of the Holy Spirit without any limits.

John 3:34-35

34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

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Examples:

1. He knew what Nathaniel was thinking while he was under a fig tree.

John 1:43-48

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

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2. He knew when His disciples were having conflicts.

Mark 9:33-37

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"

34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

36 Then He took a little child and set him during them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,

37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

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3. He knew when they were having doubts.

4. He knew when they were afraid.

5. He knew Judas was going to betray Him.

6. He knew all His disciples were going to deny Him.

Jesus knew these things about them because He was gifted by the Holy Spirit and listened to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus would withdraw from everyone and everything to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Luke 5:16

16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.
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It was after a time of prayer that He knew who He should choose to be His 12 disciples.

Luke 6:12-13

12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God.

13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

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This was the beginning of a relationship with His disciples in which Jesus was always listening to the Holy Spirit in order to know and understand His disciples. As He prayed for them, He listened to the Holy Spirit to reveal things about them that He needed to know.

But Jesus also knew His disciples by the way He communicated with them.

Jesus had many discussions with His disciples while they were walking from one place to another; when He retreated with His disciples to solitary places; when He ate meals with them.

Have you ever analyzed these discussions and what Jesus did to know His disciples?

- He **asked** questions
- He **listened**

There are recorded over 300 questions in the four gospels that Jesus asked people. I have never counted them. But one bible teacher who did says there are 307.

Not all these questions were directed to His 12 disciples. But they heard all of them. They saw first hand how He relate to people.

With His disciples, many of His discussions began with a meaningful question that would reveal something to Him that was very personal about His disciples.

- Who do men say that I am?
- But who do you say that I am?
- Why are you afraid, have you no faith?
- Do you also want to leave me?
- What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?
- Can you not tarry with me one hour?
- Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?
- Do you love me?

You would think if you were God, you would not need to ask anyone any questions. You would think Jesus would have done all the talking.

But instead of doing all the talking, Jesus frequently started a discussion with His disciples by asking a meaningful question or interjecting a meaningful question during the discussion.

I believe He did this to model for them how to relate to those they would disciple. He knew they would need to ask those they disciplined meaningful questions and listen if they were going to know them and have a real-life relationship with them.

When His disciples answered these questions, Jesus listened to **more** than just the words that were being said or the facts that were being shared. He listened to identify the **emotions** or **issues** that laid behind the words.

When I first saw this in Jesus it confronted two weaknesses in me that hindered me from knowing someone and having a real life relationship with them.

- I wasn't any good at asking meaningful questions.
- I wasn't a good listener.

For me, learning to ask good questions and being a good listener has been a real challenge and a slow process. Our family life and the friends we have during our childhood has a great impact on how we learn to relate to people. I came from a single parent home and the most significant person in my life was my father. When it came to ask meaningful questions and being a good listener, it was not a priority.

We would sit at the dinner table night after night in absolute silence. We could sit in the living room watching TV shows and he would never say a word. When he had me work with him on some project, he might talk about how to do the project, but he never asked personal questions about me. There was never questions like, how is your day going today; how are you feeling about your life; what do you like about that girl you are dating; what are your fears about your future; what is going on with your friends; how are you doing with your mother's death; how do you feel about our relationship; what is it like being my son?

Since he did not ask me meaningful questions, I did not feel that he really wanted to get to know me. This caused me to question His love for me. I have felt the same way in many other relationships. When people do not ask me meaningful questions, I do not feel that they really want to know me. I do not feel loved.

I was not aware that I had the same problem until I got married.

As a child, I was taught certain manners about communication. I was taught that I should not curse. When I was with adults, I should not speak until I am spoken to. I should not interrupt people, especially the elderly. I should listen with my eyes. I was taught to take good notes when an authority is teaching me something.

These are some good rules for communication, and I could tell you that I have benefited from following these rules.

But after I became a Christian, I learned from the life of Jesus that in order to have real life relationships with people and really know them, I had to learn how to ask meaningful questions and I had to become a good listener.

When I got married at age 22, I thought I was pretty good at communication in a relationship. You can't learn much about relationships if you think you are good at it?

That false assumption did not last long after I got married. I discovered quickly that even though we were both human beings created in the image of God, there were some vast differences in the way we were made. It was like we were from two different planets. It was like I was from Mars and she was from Venus. This created a lot of serious conflict!

I loved my wife, but I did not have a clue what to do until God spoke to me from 1 Peter 3:7.

[1 Peter 3:7](#)

[7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.](#)

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He told me that one of my jobs as a husband was to study my wife in order to know her better.

Now I knew from my educational experience that in order to understand anything you had to ask the right questions. But I had no idea what those questions were with a woman based on where I came from. So, this began a slow process of learning meaningful questions that I could ask her and others in order to know them and understand them.

Later, because I was a Pastor, one of my jobs was knowing my sheep.

[Proverbs 27:23](#)

[23 Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds;](#)

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In order to know them, I knew I had to study them, especially when they came to be for counsel. I began the slow process of learning meaningful questions that I could ask my people.

Here I am at age 64 and I am still learning. But here are a few meaningful questions that I have learned that I can ask anyone in order to know them at a deeper level.

- [What is the most difficult challenge you are facing right now?](#)
- [How are you feeling about that challenge?](#)
- [What is your greatest fear?](#)
- [What do you want to see happen?](#)

Besides not being good at asking meaningful questions, I was also not a good listener.

Do you consider yourself to be a good listener?

When I got married, I discovered I had some listening habits that are not good habits if your aim is to know someone.

1. I listened without Focus

This is the kind of listening where I am *present*, and I recognize there is noise coming from someone that is directed at me, but I don't even try to hear the content. This is the kind of listening parents sometimes employ with the toddler that rattles on non-stop.

I may insert an 'uh huh' in every now and then while someone is talking, but most of my attention is focused on whatever I am doing or something else on my mind.

Obviously, this type of 'listening' is not respectful of or helpful to the person doing the talking. They don't feel loved and I am not going to know and understand them using this approach to listen.

2. I listened for the 'Gist'

This is often the type of listening I employ when I am in a *hurry* or I am busy doing something else. I listen just enough to get an idea of what the other person is saying, so I can determine how it impacts **me** and whether I need to **respond**. While I am doing this, I only give half of my attention to the person speaking, putting most of my focus on my own internal dialogue and how it pertains to me. The person speaking can usually tell that my attention is elsewhere, and they are often left not feeling heard. They don't feel loved and I am not going to know and understand them using this approach to listen.

3. I listened to Respond

This has been one of the hardest habits for me to break. I am listening but my aim is really to make myself known. I am usually just waiting for the person to pause for a moment so I can insert my argument, story, or opinion.

My response often comes out quickly and enthusiastically, showing others that I am more focused on my own agenda than I am **understanding and knowing** them.

I send others the message that what I have to say is more valuable than what they just said. It is usually obvious to the other person that they are not really being heard. They don't feel loved and I am not going to know and understand them using this approach to listen.

I can especially use this approach to listen when I am feeling compelled to fix someone and I just want to get my point across.

Any one of these three ways of listening may be OK in certain circumstances. But if I really want to know someone, I should not use these approaches to listen. I need to be like Jesus, ask meaningful questions, and listen to hear and understand them.

In order to ask meaningful questions and become a good listener, I have got to overcome my greatest enemy!

SELF-FOCUS!!!

Philippians 2:3-5

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
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For Jesus, it was a greater priority to know others than it was for them to know Him. He always thought of others before He thought of Himself. He always made serving others more important than serving Himself. He always made knowing others the priority in any relationship.

We are all broken by sin, so we must overcome being self-focused in relationships in order to know others.

What are some obvious signs that I am being self-focused?

- I don't ask meaningful questions that would help me know people and understand them
- I am not a good listener
- When I start a conversation, I talk first about what I need
- I interrupt what people are saying so I can talk
- I interrupt people when they are having a conversation with someone else
- I tell people the same thing over and over
- I pre-judge people
- I share those judgments with others
- I get annoyed with people when I do not feel they are listening to me
- I don't stop what I am doing to listen and understand people
- I allow other people to interrupt a conversation because the other person is more important to me.
- When I feel I am being personally attacked, I focus on how I am offended rather than focusing on the needs of the person that offended me.
- I isolate myself from people

I have got good news and bad news about these bad habits. The bad news is that there is not a quick fix to these bad habits.

The good news is that God can change us through Jesus from living a self-focused life to a life that is focused on discipleship through real life relationships.

The best place to grow and overcome being self-focused is to be connected to other believers that are sharing real life relationships and that want to share in a real-life relationship with you.

We don't develop the fruit of the Spirit living in isolation.

[Galatians 5:22-23](#)

[22 But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,](#)

[23 gentleness, self-control.](#)

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You can't grow in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control living in isolation.

[2 Peter 1:5-8](#)

[5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,](#)

[6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,](#)

[7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.](#)

[8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)

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You can't to your faith these things without living in real life relationships with other believers.

Any change in the way you relate to others begins with a change in your personal relationship to God. You cannot live separated from Him and change how you relate to other people. You can modify your behavior, but you cannot change your heart.

Only Jesus can change the human heart to love people the way He loves us.

Will you receive Jesus?

Will you answer His call to make disciples through real life relationships?

If you are discipling others will you aim to be like Jesus with those you disciple?

- Will you be transparent with them?
- Will you make your priority to know them?

Jesus knew that He could not disciple people that He did not know. How could He know what to say to them if He did not know them? How could He know how to encourage them if He did not know them? How could He know what they needed if He did not know them? He was intentional about knowing those He disciplined.