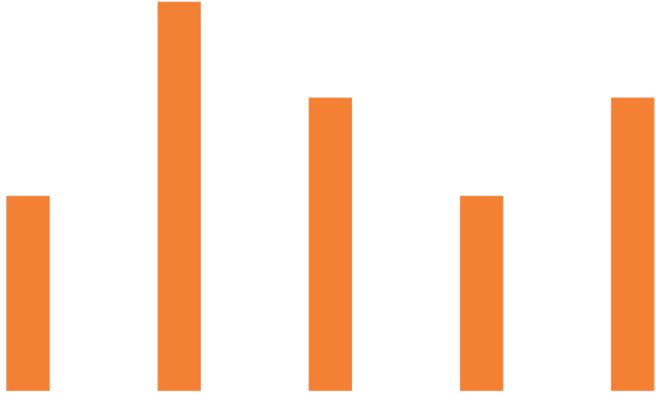


[manual]



RAM
SERIES

RAM series



manual

John Van Epp , Ph.D.

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Second Edition

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Preaching **the series**

4: Preaching the RAM Series Six Sermons

Overview of the RAM Series Sermon Series

The six sample sermons apply the RAM to relationships. In the first message, the RAM is used as a framework for understanding how to begin and continue developing a relationship with God. In the other five messages, one component/dynamic bond of the RAM is the theme of the message and applied to dating, marriage, parenting, friendships and the church family.

As I described before, a unique benefit of this series is that the framework of the RAM provides a way to talk about ALL these relationships at the same time, especially dating and marriage. When Pastors want to preach on marriage which is so important, often the singles feel left out or alienated. The RAM provides a way to look at ALL relationships at the same time, with a primary emphasis in this series on dating and marriage, but also significant applications in each message to parenting and relationships in the church family.

The design is to have a 6-week total church focus on a healthy relationship theme and encourage all youth and adults in the church to attend one of the two studies, while the kids and Middle School youth attend their own classes on the RAM. The Sunday messages begin with applying the RAM to building and sustaining a relationship with God, and then the remaining five messages take one of the five relationship dynamics of the RAM each Sunday (know, trust, rely, commit & touch) and apply that concept primarily to dating and marriage relationships, and with additional applications to parenting and friendships.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (first message).

The first sermon in the RAM Series series applies the RAM to building and growing in a relationship with God... knowing God, trusting and relying on God, making a commitment to God, and "touching" God (e.g. offering your bodies a living sacrifice;

your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; and when we touch the lives of others, we touch God—see Matthew 25:31-40 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’).

The remaining five sermons take a dynamic bond of the RAM each message. Let me give you a couple examples. The first dynamic bond of relationships described in the RAM is how you know someone. This important area is applied to building and growing a healthy dating relationship in the Single study, and then, in the Married study, it is applied to sustaining a close communication and openness of staying in the know.

The sermon on this relationship bond of “know” also addresses some aspects of dating and marriage but expands the applications to other relationships. Here are some highlights:

KNOW (second message)

- In dating, the importance of really getting to know a dating partner/dangers of jumping to conclusions/making sure what you know sets the ceiling for your trust, reliance, commitment and touch;
- In marriage, the challenges of staying in the know with your spouse/good communication/open sharing and focused listening; developing true intimacy;
- In parenting, how it is too easy to lose “staying in the know” with your kids; the need to adjust schedules and our many devices in order to have undistracted talks and togetherness;
- In the family of God, the important of authentic and transparent relationships, with true “getting to know” and “feeling known” happening in the body of Christ. Making sure that those who come to worship do not feel invisible, but that they feel known and understood by other members.

TRUST (third message)

- In dating, you may know a dating partner only a little, but create a “social media” representation and over-trust them; in the first “90-day probation period” of a new relationship, it is common to meet the representative of the person... but as new experiences and patterns begin to emerge, you get to know the real person which should be the actual basis of your trust;
- In marriage, it is vital to keep positive attitudes of trust by choosing to bring your spouse’s best qualities to the forefront of your mind while minimizing their irritating qualities; the importance of being willing to forgive and the process of rebuilding trust;
- In parenting, the ways that trusting kids goes up and down, and the importance of being willing to rebuild trust;
- In church family and friendships, similar themes of trust, forgiveness and positive attitudes.

RELY (fourth message), COMMIT (fifth message), TOUCH (sixth message)

The next Sunday (fourth week) would cover “reliance”; then “commitment” (fifth week); and then then “touch” (week six).

It is an option to take the first message that applies the RAM to the building and sustaining of a relationship with God and put that message at the end of the series. However, in my sample sermons, I put it first because I thought it provided a better Biblical foundation for understanding the RAM and using it as a tool for understanding the specific bonds which need to be developed and maintained in all our relationships. In other words, our relationship with God is a template for what we are to be doing in our relationships with people (rather than our relationships with people are a template for understanding our relationship with God). This also allows you to emphasize that our relationship with God is foundational to all our relationships with people.

The primary emphasis is on dating and marriage, but I added some minor references to relationship in families and among your church family. My intention was to help make each message have something for everyone.

The large RAM chart (7'x5') that came with this series is a valuable tool to use upfront

with you when this series is preached. It not only is a good visual of the specific dynamic bond that you are focusing on in a particular message, but it also allows you to show the interaction of all the bonds because you can move the levels up and down, creating different profiles. The safe zone, described earlier, along with high risk dating profiles are very easy to illustrate and make understandable to your congregation.

Also, for long-term relationships like a marriage, friendship or a parent-child relationship, it is easy to choose a common experience and chart out the normal fluctuations that would occur (the Law of Diminishing Returns). For instance, just asking the couples in the congregation, "So tell me, what happens to these bonds of your relationship when you have a baby?" You will probably have some chuckles, and you can move the levels in ways that the congregation will nod in agreement. For instance, some of the levels will begin to drop, usually beginning with the touch, and then continuing with some loss of rely (all about the baby's needs and not what the couple needs), and even a little slippage in the know (not as much time to sit around and just talk). These changes are normal, and the RAM chart makes understanding these fluctuations intuitive.

You will find that I put suggestions in the sermons on how you can utilize the RAM chart to illustrate the normal dynamic fluctuations of a relationship, and what can be done to build and rebuild the relationship when these deficiencies occur. Remember, relationships are not self-correcting, so when they develop an imbalance even under normal and expected circumstances, if a couple does not do anything about it, that deflated bond(s) will create a slow leak that could eventually turn into a big blowout!

The sample sermon messages are organized into two sections: The Sermon Outline, and The Sermon Manuscript. There is no requirement to stick exactly to the outline or the manuscript. It is my hope that the messages are long enough for what you need, and that you find many ways to explain Biblical principles and concepts along with very practical applications. As long as you are using the RAM Series with life group studies, elementary and youth lessons, you have permission to use these messages, revise them, and add your own salient points, illustrations or applications. The goal is for you to present messages consistent with Scripture and the concepts

of the RAM, and that will provide practical and transforming relationship growth to your congregation. Please review closely our licensing and copyright agreement with its restrictions on the use and distribution of any of the RAM Series materials (including sermons).

Finally, because Pastor Steve Poe was the first to preach through the RAM Series with such relevant and timely applications, he generously allowed some his content to be included these sermon manuscripts.

Week Three: Trust

SERMON OUTLINE

Introduction: Application makes all the difference.

Review: Review of the RAM, relationships are not self-correcting.

Trust: a practical definition: The feeling of confidence that comes from what you “think” of someone (your trust-picture)

Building trust in new relationships:

1. Danger of trusting when not earned (Samson and Delilah)
2. Trust should be built from the “getting to know” process
3. Discernment needs to be taught by parents to their children

Sustaining Trust in Long-term Relationships

1. Trust is not JUST earned, it is also a CHOICE
2. Trust feelings come from what the qualities of a person you focus on (Paul and Barnabas and John Mark—Acts 15-16)

Practical Steps for Re-building Trust When Broken

1. Keep communicating
2. Cultivate mutual openness
3. Be willing to forgive and let go
4. Recognize the difference between forgiveness and trust.
5. Be willing to change some of your relationship rules
6. Be willing to give trust
7. Don't give up

Conclusion

SERMON MANUSCRIPT

Introduction

I love to go to home improvement stores and buy all the stuff I need for a home project. It feels great because I think I'm finally going to get this stuff done... I'm finally making some progress. Now it's going to get painted, it's going to get stained, it's going to get fixed, it's going to get built. The house is going to look a lot nicer because I bought this stuff. Then I get home and think... but not today... I'm too tired... or it's too cold or too hot out.

So, I set the stuff in my garage and go in and have lunch or get on my computer. But now every time I go out to the garage I just feel guilty because there it sits. I felt like I was making progress but the problem is this: **Application makes all the difference.** A bucket of paint won't make the house look any better unless I open the can.

Application makes all the difference. Well, in a similar fashion, relationships are important, and it doesn't matter if you're talking about someone you're dating or a spouse or a friend or God... if we want healthy relationships we have to invest in them.

But often, we see the same dynamic in relationships that we see in home improvement. We want to improve our relationship, so we go buy a book, or we go to a seminar to find some answers, or we go to church to get inspired. We walk away and say that was good... I'm making progress... I'm moving forward. You're not! You feel like something great is happening because you attended this seminar. It hasn't! Unless... you have *applied and put in to practice* what you've learned. Because what's true about home improvement projects is true about relationships as well... Application makes all the difference.

The house won't paint itself just because you bought the paint. Your relationships will not be stronger just because you attended a seminar or read a book. You have to decide to put these things into practice to apply them in your life. That's what I'm hoping you will do after attending this series.

If you are our guest, we are in the 3rd week of a 6-week relationship series that comes from therapist, professor and author, Dr. John Van Epp and is based around

his Relationship Attachment Model, called the RAM (for short). For over 25 years, Van Epp's relationship courses have been featured in various news shows and research studies, but a couple of years ago these courses were combined in this RAM Series to help our entire church—from our kids, our youth, and all of our single and married adults—to see how to build and sustain healthy and godly relationships. It's a simple way to look at how relationships should begin and continue to grow to in healthy ways.

During this time, we have encouraged you to attend one of two Life Group studies—one for couples about marriage, or the second study for singles about dating and friendships. If you are single and not dating, and even if you are planning on NEVER dating, there still are some really important and Biblical reasons to attend this study—you see, both married and single individuals need to provide support, accurate information and insight, and even mentoring to those who ARE dating. So, if you do not need to learn this for yourself, then definitely learn it for those you can support—your single friends, your kids or grandkids, and those within our church fellowship including our youth, the never-been-marrieds and those who have gone through divorce. There is a concept in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that when God works in our life it is not ONLY about our good, but God is also equipping us to share and help others.

So, I am determined to provide you with some things that will bring lasting change in your relationships. But you will have to take the necessary steps... do the work... application makes all the difference.

Review of RAM (optional)

Now last week I shared some basic laws of this Relationship Attachment Model or RAM. It's a simple way to look at how you can understand and set goals to improve ANY and ALL of your relationships. So even though our two Life Group tracks are designed for marriage and dating, I want to emphasize that you can use this RAM to help you in your relationship with your friends, or within your families—with parents, with kids, with grandkids—AND right here in our church life, our relationships can be profiled on the RAM so that we can be intentional about what we need to do to grow stronger together. AND FINALLY, you have a relationship with the Lord—and it is important for you to be active in that relationship, growing in your

knowledge, trust, reliance commitment and in all of your physical activities and expressions of touch—your affection, and in romantic relationships, sexual touch (use the large RAM as you make reference to each of the five bonds).

These five areas are distinct from each other—and yet, they are PIECES OF THE WHOLE—so they interact, creating different profiles of closeness. Every one of your relationships is comprised of these five bonds. Last week we identified 4 Laws of Relationships but let me summarize one of the main points in a statement: **relationships are not self-correcting**. There is a FALSE idea that a relationship will just fix itself when something bad, or something GOOD throws it out of balance. Think of normal and good things that can cause one or more of these five bonds to drop in your relationship... what does the birth of a new baby do to your marriage relationship? (Go to the RAM and drop the touch to the bottom).

That is not all... there is more to get to know (so move know level down 3-4 levels), and rely will also drop in the sense that now you are relying on each other to help meet the baby's needs, and you will put your own needs on the back burner. So many times, partners begin to feel that they cannot rely on their partner to meet their own personal needs because of the attention and demands of the baby or kids.

Now please hear me... THIS-IS-NORMAL. And there are so many other life experiences that will disrupt the bonds of your relationship... like promotions, financial hardships, job demands, illnesses, deployments and travel obligations, projects, extended family members issues, losses, and the list goes on and on!! I will say it again (or say it with me) IT IS NORMAL TO BECOME A LITTLE DEFLATED IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS.

However, the danger is when you STAY deflated expecting a relationship to just heal itself. Relationships are not self-correcting. So, this RAM can help you to PROFILE where how your relationship is being impacted by life's events, and to SET PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP GOALS to strengthen those areas that have dropped or weakened.

Last week we talked about the first dynamic "**know**". And I believe this one is like a prerequisite for the other four bonds. For instance, **knowing and being known** is

a core in your most meaningful relationships... with a good friend, with a parent, with a child, and definitely, with a spouse! In many ways, authentic transparency, honest and open communication, empathetic listening is at the heart of intimacy. And without this, everything else is a hollow shell of a relationship.

How can you **trust** your partner if your partner does not open up and disclose how they think and feel? And how can your spouse rely on you to meet their needs in loving ways if you do NOT KNOW their needs and wants!! And what is a commitment when it is void of knowing and understanding the one to whom you are committed. When our Lord described marriage as a man and woman joining their lives together to become one, the physical intimacy of oneness was to flow from the spiritual union of two souls sharing their lives together.

Knowing and being known is also a core of healthy dating. All the other four bonds should flow from this one—what you know about a dating partner should inform and set the ceiling for your trust, reliance, commitment and touch. But you have to make sure that you are getting to know the REAL person. This is why the High School and all single adults are taking the time to discuss the five most important areas to explore with a friend and especially a dating partner—five areas that strongly predict how that person would act in a long-term relationship, and particularly a marriage.

Trust: A Practical Definition

Well, today we are going to look at the second dynamic bond which is trust. Trust is NOT the same as knowing someone. So, let me define trust. The dictionary defines it as “a feeling of confidence in another.” But I want to add just a little bit to this definition. This confidence comes not directly from the other person, but from what you THINK of the other person. In other words, the FEELING of TRUST comes from a mental picture you have of a person you know. This mental picture or representation is what we are calling your “trust picture.”

Is this making sense? You see, trust has everything to do with *how you view* this person you are dating, or how you view your spouse or even how you view God! Listen you have mental images of everyone you know and so the question is how do you see this person... do you see them as trustworthy, loving and caring... or do

you see them as controlling, lazy and selfish? As you get to know a person, you put together a mental picture of what you think of them. The more you know about that person, the more details you have to accurately portray them in your mind. This opinion prompts a level of trust—for some, there are high levels of trust while for others, low amounts of trust. But for a relationship to mature and be healthy, trust is essential.

Building Trust in New Relationships

Now Benjamin Franklin said something over 200 years ago that is just as relevant today. ***“Before marriage, keep your eyes wide open; but afterwards, half shut.”***

The first half of his advice speaks to how you form and maintain a trust-picture. During the dating time or in any NEW relationship... personal or business... you need to have your eyes wide open so that you do not ASSUME something is true about a person and put that in your trust-picture only to later find out that that who they really are is very different from who you THOUGHT they were. Is this making sense? You look at a person through the lens of your trust-picture... and this lens will magnify some qualities and minimize others.

Let me use an Old Testament example. I think most of you understand that many marriages were arranged in Biblical times, and that we need to apply God’s Word to our culture, and our culture has become very individualized. But yet, there are clear principles from the Scriptures that can be identified and implemented in how we date and choose partners, especially in marriage.

Samson was one of those characters in the Bible that was blessed by God and yet had some real personal shortcomings. You can kind of think of him as one crude dude... lots of testosterone.

He was a man who was greatly used of God. But yet, Samson struggled in his more intimate relationships. You can read about his first marriage in Judges 14-15 where he was pretty neglectful of his wife... and then, in chapter 16, his involvement with a prostitute, and then enters a woman named Delilah.

*Some time later, he **fell in love** with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was*

Delilah. (Judges 16:4).

Now keep this in mind—he was in loooooove. But she was a CON.

The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, *“See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.”* (Judges 16:5 NIV).

The end of this story is that Samson is betrayed by her and then blinded and enslaved. But Samson KNEW that she could not be trusted. THREE times she broke his trust. But yet, Samson WANTED TO BELIEVE that he could put his trust in her.

We read that Delilah *“with great nagging, prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it. So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”* (1 Samuel 16:16-17 NIV).

Now think about this—THREE times she broke his trust. But yet, Samson STILL put his trust in her. And I have to believe that his **“falling in love”** with her made him see what he wanted to see... he saw IN HIS MIND a representation of a partner that did not MATCH REALITY.

This is SO RELEVANT to our relationships today. When you are building a new relationship, and especially when you feel a strong love feeling for a person, it is EASY to overlook warning signs and FILL IN THE GAPS of WHO YOU BELIEVE them to be... and even though there are some red flags, you minimize them and INFLATE YOUR TRUST.

Listen, and this is SO IMPORTANT. During the “getting to know” process in dating, you need to *fully* get to know someone so that your trust-picture is accurate. This means that you want to be acutely aware of what you are moving to the foreground AND what qualities you are moving to the background.

So often in a dating relationship, your “know” level is low but your trust is way up! (you can show low know and high trust on the RAM). You THINK you know the person, but in reality, you have created in your mind a belief of who they are by taking just the little bit that you DO KNOW and FILLING IN ALL THE GAPS of what you DON’T know... so it is not that you truly know that partner; rather, it is that you TRUST this partner. This is a perfect example of what has been long called, “*love is blind.*”

In this case, your trust is more based on your projection and not the 3T’s of getting to know someone that we described last week—do you remember them?? (pause)—TALK, TOGETHERNESS IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS, AND TIME. This is how you **really** get to know someone, but too many times in dating, people construct their “trust-picture” of dating partner with only a little time, talk and togetherness. ***Accelerated involvements are a major cause of the love is blind experience in dating. And this is definitely true with a trust that grows from filling in the gaps rather than the 3T’s of knowing a partner.***

I know some of you are already thinking to yourself, well how much time does it really take to get to know someone to determine a higher trust level? Well I’m tempted to say a lifetime because you are always working on knowing that person you care about. But when it comes to dating someone and knowing them accurately, I think the best answer I can give you is to ***practice the 3T’s***, while you ***look for emerging patterns*** over the first three months or what we called the ***90-day probation period***. We mentioned these concepts last week and those in the singles study are exploring all these concepts in-depth... you get to know key five areas that PREDICT how a dating partner will act in a long-term relationship and especially in a marriage by ***talking***, but also by being ***together*** with that person in various situations so that you see the different sides of them, and by allowing enough ***time*** for things to surface. Talk, Togetherness and Time.

And somewhere around 90-days or 3-months, new things begin to surface and patterns begin to emerge... it is then that you are getting to know the REAL person and not their REPRESENTATION.

You understand this, at first, you usually meet a dating partner’s representative. I like to call this their SOCIAL MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE. And if they have a terrific representative, just know that there is a REAL person who may be very different.

It takes TIME, TALKING and TOGETHERNESS to reveal the true character of a dating partner. Because you won't really know a person until you have seen them in several different situations and settings. I don't really know what that person is like until I see them under pressure, or where they are in their relationship with God, or what they are like around family or friends. So that's why it's important to take whatever time you need to get to know this person and pace a growing trust accordingly.

Parents, teach your kids HOW to build HEALTHY TRUST in others... help them understand that they need to take time to get to know the true character of a person... and that it is easy to THINK THE BEST of someone before you know them.

You can begin conversations like this when your kids or grandkids are only four or five years old and just in preschool. They will tell you stories about friends that are great, and then others that are mean, or bullies; or nice one minute but nasty the next. Help them to take what they "get to know" and form a "trust-picture" that is not all or nothing, good or bad. But one that is realistic and accurate and will help them know how to best relate with those other children.

We need to teach discernment... in dating... in friendships... in relationships in general. We live in a time similar to what Solomon described in Proverbs 1:20-23 (NLT): *Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gate: "How long, you simpletons, will you insist on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge? Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise.*

When we teach discernment, we help our children to know how to build SECURE TRUST based on proven qualities in others. Children are NATURALLY trusting, and when you help them develop an understanding of how to ALSO be discerning, how to PACE their trust, you EMPOWER your children to be wise and protected from getting burned in relationships. We cannot shield our kids from everything, but we can help them form accurate trust-pictures and know how to relate with someone based on that person's trustworthiness.

Sustaining Trust in Long-term Relationships

I would like to transition from building trust in a NEW relationship, to the ways we can SUSTAIN TRUST in long-term relationships. Remember what Ben Franklin said... "But in marriage, it is important to keep your eyes half shut"—I think this is what the Apostle John was referring to when he wrote that "*Love covers a multitude of sins.*" When you love someone, you move to the BACKGROUND their flaws, shortcomings, weaknesses... and you move to the FOREGROUND their strengths, positive qualities.

And this is probably what Paul meant in his "love chapter" 13 of 1 Corinthians. He wrote that love "*always protects, **always trusts**, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*" 1 Cor. 13:7-8, NIV).

Paul is trying to explain what *love is* when he says it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Did you notice the word always... but isn't that kind of extreme? (you say) Yes, I think that's the point, Paul is saying love is very extreme. Again, he says that Love is always trusting. This is what he means: when you love someone you say, "I'm going to do everything I possibly can to trust you. Because love gives you the benefit of the doubt." So, when your spouse says this, but does something else... When your boss says this, but does something else... Love says, "Before I jump to conclusions, I'm going to consider other possibilities... I'm going to wait and give them a chance to explain because I trust them."

However, do not confuse this with being naïve...Love is not naïve. Love does not negate discernment. Everything we said earlier about being accurate in how we get to know others and form trust-pictures is Biblical. This is why the Apostle Paul prayed: And this is my prayer: that ***your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight***, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ (Philippians 1:9-10, NIV).

Believing the best in someone, giving them your trust, and being loving DOES NOT NEGATE being discerning and wise. THEY GO TOGETHER. What Paul means when it says that love is always trusting is that when you love someone, you move the good to the foreground and place the negatives in the background. Love prompts

trust, forgiveness, and healing.

When it comes to long-term relationships like your marriages, parent-child relationships, other family relationships and many of your friendships, YOU WILL CHOOSE WHAT YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON WITH THAT PERSON. Being responsible for “running your trust” means that you arrange the pieces of what you know about a person to either highlight their best qualities, or their worst! So, let me go back to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, LOVE SAYS, “*Believe the best in someone.*”

Let me give you an example of where I believe that the Apostle Paul fell short of the advice he gave to Corinthians in chapter 13 when he told them to be “always trusting.” In the book of Acts (chapter 15:36ff), we read that Paul is getting ready to leave on his second missionary journey when a disagreement arose between him and Barnabas regarding John Mark (also called Mark). On an earlier trip, John Mark had prematurely left the mission and headed home. This didn’t sit well with Paul, and so he didn’t want to take John Mark along on this second trip because... *he didn’t trust him.*

Barnabas, on the other hand, argued to take John Mark along with them and defended his trustworthiness. Now we don’t know why John Mark left them on an earlier trip and went home but it left a sour taste in Paul’s mouth. Listen, have you noticed when we don’t trust someone we will often talk about their weaknesses, but when we do trust them we will talk about their strengths. It was not a difference in WHAT they knew about John Mark... the differences in their feelings of trust stemmed from the differences in WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT THEY KNEW ABOUT MARK.

Paul had taken Mark’s shortcomings and put them in the forefront of his mental representation or trust-picture. And all of Mark’s good qualities, well, they were pushed into the shadows! Barnabas, on the other hand, pulled those good qualities out of the shadows and put them in the light, center stage. And Mark’s failures and weaknesses were pushed out of sight. According to 1 Corinthians 13, Barnabas was acting in a loving way by trying to trust once again the younger John Mark.

You ask, "Why was Barnabas trusting when Paul was not?"

Well, Barnabas was known to have a positive and encouraging personality, so that played a part. Also, it may have been easier for Barnabas because John Mark was his cousin.

But regardless, the ways that Paul and Barnabas took what they knew about Mark and formed two very different trust-pictures becomes an example of how YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITY in CHOOSING to trust or not to trust... when it comes to your spouse, what qualities are you going to bring to center stage and shine a light on?? When it comes to your parent, what will you push to the background and what memories and characteristics will you bring to the foreground.

Please hear this: **TRUST MUST BE EARNED, BUT TRUST IS ALSO GIVEN. *trust is not dictated ONLY by the trustworthiness of another person***... it comes from what you know and **HOW you ARRANGE** what you know into a representation or trust picture of that person.

In the Old Testament you may remember that Jonathan and David were best of friends. But they had very different "trust-pictures" of King Saul, Jonathan's father. David believed that Saul was motivated by jealousy and rage and would take any opportunity to kill him. Whereas, Jonathan trusted his father, believing that he would never act so aggressively toward David, particularly because David was married to his sister, Michal, who had been given in marriage to David by Saul himself!

So, David and Jonathan set up a way to test Saul's heart. The outcome was that David's trust-picture proved true as Saul DID threaten to kill David when speaking with Jonathan.

So, to say that David should just go ahead, and trust Saul would be ludicrous. And equally foolish would it be to say that David's trust is SOLELY based on what he focused on... *"just do NOT focus on the fact that Saul wants to kill you; then you can trust him."*

Uhhh-NO. Saul was untrustworthy and any way you reworked his strengths and

weaknesses would not change the reality of Saul's evil motives. So, I do not want you to misunderstand me... I am NOT saying you should "give everyone a blank check..." or "trust everyone..." or "be naïve and undiscerning."

But many of the "trust" issues in your relationship with your spouse are not so black and white. And what I am saying is that your *attitude toward your spouse*, for example, is NOT determined SOLELY by your spouse's actions. Your attitude is shaped by what you THINK ABOUT what you know about your spouse—what you dwell on, what you focus on in your thoughts, how you reflect on your spouse when you are thinking of him or her. You MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for that attitude of trust, or mistrust!

This is what Paul was saying to the Philippians in chapter two verses 3-5 when he wrote:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others (your spouse... your son or daughter... your friend...) in humility value these others above yourself, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of these others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus..."

Let me go back to where I began. You can hear all this and nod your heads, and say, "Yes, I want to have the same mindset in my marriage as my Lord Jesus; or in my family relationships; or in my friendships; or here in our church community!" But unless you leave here and pay attention to your thoughts about your spouse, and consciously and intentionally move the positive qualities of that person to the center stage of your thinking, and make your mental representation, your trust-picture of that person highlight those good qualities, ONLY WHEN you **do the hard work of application** will your relationship improve. When you cannot trust or if you don't know how to trust, or if you're not willing to take some risks when it comes to trust, you will never ever fully engage relationally, and there will always be something lacking in your relationship.

Strong relationships, marriages, families, friends require strong trust, so let me close by give you seven practical ways to build AND rebuild your trust.

#1 Keep communicating. Communication is one of the most important factors in building trust between two people. In fact, I often say the three most important things for a successful marriage is communication, communication, communication. So, spend more time communicating about your hurts and problems instead of sitting on them and brooding. And, of course when it comes to communication, it is always better if you can do it face to face.

And don't hold back when you are dealing with relationship issues. When you have something to tell this person, make sure you do it. Don't sweep things under a rug just because they are difficult or have not previously been resolved. Instead, do the hard stuff, and "*speak the truth in love.*" (Ephesians 4:15). Did you hear that: talk assertively about your needs, your views, and your hurts. But be sure to do that in love, and listen to what the other person needs, their views and hurts. That is love and this type of communication in relationships opens the door for trust to once again develop.

#2 Cultivate mutual openness. Make sure that both of you have access to the other person's life. Mutuality and reciprocity are vital to building trust. And one of the most important areas of mutuality is transparency... that it is a two-way street. Secrets can be dangerous, especially in a marriage. Trust needs mutual openness. Your spouse should have a "master key" to every part of your life. Just decide that you will never have a conversation you wouldn't want them to hear or view a website you wouldn't want them to see or go someplace you wouldn't want them to know about. Both of you need to have the same degree of investment, openness and transparency in your relationship.

#3 Be willing to forgive and let go. When we've been wronged, we usually have an urge to punish the person who wronged us. We want them to feel the pain that they have caused us. This may be normal and even justified, but God wants to help you forgive. Ultimately, this kind of thinking hurts everyone involved and damages trust even more. It's been said, "Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and then hoping the other person dies!"

When you've been wronged in a relationship, it's important to give clear and specific guidelines for how trust can be restored, but don't continue to punish the other person who is trying to make things right. Listen closely to this Scripture from Ephesians 4:31-32. *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

#4 Recognize the difference between forgiveness and trust. Please hear me on this, forgiveness and trust are not the same things. When someone hurts you or does something to you, Scripture makes it clear that you have a responsibility to forgive that person. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* Eph. 4:32 NIV.

But you may need to be slow and cautious about trusting them again. For instance, if one of your teenage kids took your car without your permission, then I am sure you would forgive him/her. But I also bet that you are not going to leave your keys laying around! Now I am NOT saying that you would never trust them again. But I am just saying that trust needs to come slowly. Forgiveness, by its very nature cannot be earned; it can only be given. However, trust, by its very nature, should be given as it is earned.

My example may be light, but the reality of trust being earned is so true, especially in more meaningful and emotional situations. It takes more time to rebuild trust than to forgive. And it is usually the offender that wants to "get back to normal" long before the time needed for trust to rebuild. It is when you engage in BOTH forgiveness and rebuilding trust that you will move toward healing your hurts and restoring your relationship.

Some of you have had serious breaches of trust in your marriage. And if you think that forgiving your spouse requires immediately trusting them again, then you will probably become stuck in unforgiveness. But what you are really doing is just trying to protect yourself from being hurt from trusting again too quickly. The road of reconciliation requires that you walk through the journey of forgiving AND reconstructing your trust and belief in the one who hurt you. So, know that even after you have been able to forgive and let something go, there may still be a distance you

need to go to rebuild your belief and trust in that person.

#5 Be willing to change some of your relationship rules. This is related to what I just said that, trust is earned. Look at this RAM for a minute, when trust drops in a relationship, what happens to the “know”? It also goes down... you feel like, “I thought I knew you but now I am not sure who you are.” So, when trust is broken or challenged, the “trust-picture” you have of a person is fragmented. And to put it back together, you may need to set some boundaries in the relationship, increase the transparency, and alter some agreed-upon rules.

Oftentimes, whatever was involved in the breaking of the trust must be altered in your relationship. Rebuilding trust often requires a change in how you and your partner handle some aspects of your relationship... like your finances, or a habit, or how you interact with others. So, be willing to review and revise your relationship to honor the rebuilding of your belief and trust in each other.

#6 Be willing to give trust. The old saying, “trust is earned” is only half right. Think about this: Is it possible for you to do everything right and truly earn someone’s trust, but yet that person chooses to NOT trust you? The answer is a resounding “yes”! Trust will never develop in your relationship unless trust is both earned and given.

I know that some of you error on being too trusting, but a lot of us error on not “trusting again” after we have been burned, on being too perfectionistic in our expectations of a spouse, or a child, or a parent. Let your trust be seasoned with grace. I know that we emphasized that your trust-picture is shaped by what you focus on. But, to be clear, you must find the balance between looking squarely at the trust-worthiness of your partner, while knowing that you also have the responsibility to choose what you will put in the foreground and what you will put in the background. When Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, 13: 7, “*Love always trusts*” he meant that love should compel you to look for the best in someone, to focus on their good qualities, and to give them your trust. Rebuilding your trust in someone doesn’t mean that you turn a blind eye to all their faults, but it does mean that you need to put their best qualities in the forefront of your mind and see them in the best possible light.

#7 Don't give up! The Bible also says that, *"Love covers over a multitude of sins."* I love that picture of love being strong enough to cover our imperfections and fill in the cracks of our broken hearts. Don't quit when it gets hard! Keep loving each other and allow God to use the power of love and grace to bring wholeness and healing to your relationship. Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote...Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Let me wrap this up: Trust is essential in your relationships! It is the feelings of security and confidence that actually come from what you think and focus on with another. So, when you are building a new relationship, let what you get to know about someone set the ceiling for your trust... and take your time, get to know how this person acts in different situations and moods, and grow in the depth of what you talk about.

And for your marriage, parenting, friendships and other long-term relationships, know that you are ALWAYS "filtering" what you focus on. Learn to put the best of the person in the front of your mind, and not their worst. YOU must run your trust-atti-