

KIRBSTONES

ALONG THE NARROW WAY

curb-stone (kûrb'stôn') - *noun* - one of the stones or a range of stones forming a curb, as along a sidewalk or roadway. Historically, the curbstones were placed vertically along the edges of the roadbed, and the paving material was backfilled against the row of curbstones. The curbstones served ¹to hold the material in the roadbed, ²to prevent the scattering of the material along the edges, and ³to define the road itself from all the adjoining areas.

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¹³ "ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE. FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT. ¹⁴ BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT." - MATTHEW 7:13-14 - NIV



One of the greatest blessings God gives us in this life is the gift of relationships. Long before our governments, schools, businesses, denominations, or even nations, there were relationships. God created us for relationship with himself and with one another. We are not designed to live in isolation. We need love, encouragement, accountability, and companionship. Relationships enrich our lives, while they strengthen our faith, and provide opportunities for serving Christ and others.

As I reflect on the importance of relationships, I find myself considering three dimensions of healthy relationships: (1) *modeling*, (2) *using*, and (3) *growing*. Jesus provides the *ultimate model* for healthy relationships. Throughout the gospels, we see him intentionally investing his life in others. While he ministered to multitudes, he gave special attention to a small group. He walked with them, taught them, corrected them, encouraged them, and prepared them for ministry. *He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.* – Mark 3:14 Notice the sequence. Before they were sent out, they were called to him. *Relationship preceded responsibility.*

Jesus demonstrated that meaningful relationships require time, presence, and intentionality. He shared meals, traveled roads, answered questions, listened to concerns. He entered into the everyday lives of persons he loved. His example reminds us that relationships are not built through *occasional contact*, but through *consistent investment*.

As followers of Christ, we are called to model relationships that reflect his character. We are to be gracious, forgiving, trustworthy, compassionate, and truthful. People often learn more from what we demonstrate than from what we say. Healthy Christian relationships become living stories that witness to the transforming power of Christ.

Relationships are not simply gifts to be enjoyed; they are also tools to be used for God's purposes. Throughout Scripture, God uses relationships to accomplish his work. Moses/Aaron. David/Jonathan. Paul/Titus, Barnabas, Timothy, and many others. God regularly works through people connected to one another. *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up.* Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Relationships provide encouragement during difficult seasons, wisdom during uncertain times, and strength when we are weary. Relationships allow us to share one

another's burdens, celebrate our collective victories, and support each other in faith. Within the church, they become channels through which God ministers to his people. A timely phone call, a handwritten note, a prayer offered at the right moment, or a word of encouragement can make a profound difference in someone's life.

The Christian faith was never intended to be lived alone. God designed the church as a family, a body, and a fellowship. Relationships enable us to care for one another, sharpen one another, and serve together in ways none of us could accomplish individually.

Like gardens, relationships do not thrive automatically. Healthy relationships require cultivation. Left unattended, even the strongest relationships can weaken. They must be nurtured through communication, understanding, shared experiences, and forgiveness. *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4:2-3 Notice Paul's phrase, *Make every effort*. Strong relationships do not happen by accident. Relationships require intentional effort.

We grow relationships by spending time together. We grow them by listening carefully rather than merely waiting for our turn to speak. We grow them by extending grace when others disappoint us. We grow them by choosing forgiveness over resentment, reconciliation over division.

In a culture marked by isolation and conflict, Christians have an opportunity to demonstrate a better way. We can model humility, kindness, patience, and love. As we do, our relationships are stronger and more Christ-centered.

Ultimately, every healthy relationship finds its foundation in God's relationship with us. The good news of the gospel is that God took the initiative. He loved us before we loved him. He pursued us before we sought him. Through Jesus Christ, he made a way for us to be reconciled to a holy God.

Our relationship with God becomes the source from which all other relationships flow. As we receive his grace, we learn to extend grace. As we experience his forgiveness, we become more willing to forgive. As we understand his love, we become better equipped to love others. Relationships are kingdom opportunities. Every friendship, community interaction, church relationship provide an opportunity to advance the kingdom of God.

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