

## **Sermon Series: The Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships**

### **Sermon Title: The Building Block of Responsibility**

#### **Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:28**

**Sermon Summary:** This study looks at how we should live lives of responsibility by not stealing, doing useful work with our own hands, and sharing with those who are in need. In order to do this we must practice personal responsibility in all of our relationships. We discover from our text that there are at least three steps which go into making the building block of responsibility: Stop Stealing/Start Working/Start Sharing. These three steps have components that may not be apparent at first glance, but have vital applications to healthy relationships.

#### **Full Sermon Notes**

“Who else could rescue me from my failing, Who else would offer His Only Son, Who else invites me to call Him Father, Only a Holy God!”

And it absolutely amazes me that He desires a personal relationship with me! What an awesome God. And He has been so gracious to give us the Bible so we can understand the dynamics of good relationships, both with God and with our fellow human beings! Today we're going to talk about the building block of responsibility. Would you pray with me as I ask God to teach us by way of His Holy Spirit on this extremely important topic? Let's pray!

Paul gives us these words in our text found in Ephesians 4:28. Let's read it...

Ephesians 4:28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

In this one verse, Paul gives us three steps in making the building block of responsibility for healthy relationships.

#### **1. The first step in making the building block of responsibility is to stop stealing!**

Paul said...

Ephesians 4:28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer,

Now I know a lot of you in this room just checked out on me because you thought in your mind, “I don't steal!” and some of you might even say, “Preacher, I've never taken a single penny from someone I didn't earn!” That's great! God Bless you for that, however, what I'm about to tell you may shake your world. There's many ways to steal and one of those ways is by doing nothing! Yep, you heard me right, doing nothing. Sometimes doing nothing is stealing. But how in the world could that be true? It's true when you are not doing your fair share of the work in a relationship. When you are letting others do everything. When you are not carrying your fair

share of the load you are in reality stealing from the other person or from the group. How? When you don't do your fair share of the work someone else has to do your share of the work and that means you've stolen precious time from them, resources, energy. If you don't do your part in helping with the expenses in a mutually beneficial enterprise then others are footing the bill for you and you are in essence stealing from them. If in a relationship you are always taking, but never giving, then you are stealing! Matthew Henry, in his commentary on this verse of Scripture said these powerful words...

"Idleness makes thieves. Those who will not work, expose themselves to temptations to steal. Men ought to be industrious, that they may do some good, and that they may be kept from temptation. They must labour, not only that they may live honestly, but that they may have to give to the wants of others. What then must we think of those called Christians, who grow rich by fraud, oppression, and deceitful practices! Alms, to be accepted of God, must not be gained by unrighteousness and robbery, but by honesty and industry."

Henry, M., & Scott, T. (1997). *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Eph 4:25). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.

If you want to be a good witness to the people you work with, you've got to stop stealing from them when it comes to sharing the load! They're not going to respect you if you are a loafer! Everybody wants to get the job done and go home, but if you're not doing your part then you're stealing from your fellow employees and your employer and you are destroying your witness! And here's something to remember that might help you in the motivation department... God's Word says this...

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

Colossians 3:24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

If you do everything that you do as unto the Lord, then whether you love your job or hate your job you could do a better job because now you're doing what you do for your Savior and Lord! And I would be remiss if I didn't say: If you are literally stealing something tangible from somebody, like their personal property, or if you are stealing their time, and resources, by not doing your part, remember that you are really stealing from The Lord! "Pastor Larry, now that's a stretch! Come on!" Well let me tell you someone else who made the stretch. Jesus said...

Matthew 25:42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

Matthew 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Matthew 25:44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

Matthew 25:45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

If someone stole something from one of your children, would you take it personally? Of course you would. Well, we are God's children and when we steal from one of God's kids, He takes it personally. So Paul says, "stop stealing!!" This coming week I want you to ask yourself this question:

What are some ways I may have unintentionally committed theft in a relationship!

## **2. The Second step in making the building block of responsibility is to start working!**

Ephesians 4:28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands...

You've been gifted by God to do specific tasks, whether in work or at church, talents, competencies, and abilities! Paul said this...

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

1 Corinthians 12:5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

1 Corinthians 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Paul put it this way in the book of Romans...

Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;

Romans 12:7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;

Romans 12:8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

So first of all, we should be busy using our special gifts, talents and abilities to help the family, the marriage, the church, or your team at work! Without each of us doing our part, the work will not get done and that affects everybody! And we've all known people who will say, "I just don't have any gifts, I have nothing to contribute!" Let me tell you right now that is a lie from the enemy of your soul, Satan. It's simply not true. We all have something to contribute. Let me give you an example. There was a precious lady in my home church named Mrs. Billie. She could not drive a car because of a sickness she had when she was a child. It left her severely disabled. Though she was crippled, she walked everywhere she went. However, she loved the Lord and loved serving at the church. When she found out I was going into the ministry, she gave me several boxes filled with 8 1/2 x 11 pieces of paper with articles from various Christian newspapers, church newsletters and bulletins. They were stories and sermon illustrations. She had been collecting them for years and wanted me to have them as a resource for my messages. Years later, when I served a church in Tennessee as youth pastor, there was a

young lady named Donna, who had Muscular dystrophy. She was in a wheelchair that helped brace her neck. She could use her hands just a little bit to drive her electric wheelchair and she could write with her right hand. She told me one day that she wanted to volunteer to do some work at the church but didn't know if there was anything she could do. I prayed about it and God reminded me of those unorganized boxes of illustrations. For months, she would come one day a week to the church and my secretary and I would place those pages on a table and she would read them and then write a sentence or two summary on each page so we could organize the illustrations to be used for sermons! She was as thrilled to do that work as I was to have those articles organized. Several years later, when I took my first church as a pastor in Nashville, TN, those illustrations were such a blessing to me.

The point is that you have work to do, a role to play, unique gifts and abilities to use for God's Glory and to build His kingdom. But now I've got to bring up a practical matter some of you would rather I not bring up! No matter what your gift mix is, there are some things that everyone needs to do. There are chores that need to be done in life and regardless of your talents, you need to be a part of taking care of basic things. And especially in relationships! In other words, young people, you can't tell your parents that taking out the garbage is just not your gift mix, or making up your bed, or keeping your room clean. "Yeh, not my thing!" Sorry, that won't work! Even children should have chores! It teaches responsibility! How many of you kids have chores? Doing your chores, whatever they may be, like putting the toys up after you've played with them, is so important. In a family we should all do our part! It's not right to expect everybody else in the family to do their share of the work and yours too! For just a moment, think about your church family. Your church family needs everybody plugging in and doing their part so we can do the ministry we're supposed to do! We have some awesome ministry leaders, but they can't meet all the ministry needs in our church.

Evidently this is not a new issue! Paul talked in detail about this in his letter to the Thessalonians. Evidently, some were trying to use the teachings about Jesus' second coming as an excuse for not being involved. It was like they were saying, "Well, Jesus is coming back soon so it doesn't really matter if we work or not, because we're all going home anyway!" Well, they forgot something really important that Jesus had said...

Matthew 24:36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

And guess what? Jesus didn't come back in their lifetimes and Paul knew they were simply using that as an excuse to be lazy so he makes things real clear for them when he reminds them of how he and his traveling companions had lived when they were ministering in Thessaloniki...

2 Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,

2 Thessalonians 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

2 Thessalonians 3:9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

2 Thessalonians 3:11 We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

2 Thessalonians 3:13 And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

The writer of Proverbs puts it this way...

Proverbs 12:11 Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

So it's clear we should all be willing to do our part and take personal responsibility for the things we can! Now let me take this in a little different direction from just physical labor or the responsibility to be a productive member of society. This working step is a vital step in the building block of responsibility in every relationship you have on planet earth! And especially in a marriage relationship. I've had people tell me this: "if it's a good marriage, a Christian marriage, then you shouldn't have to work at it, it should just come naturally!" And here's my reply, "Without work it won't continue to be a good marriage! If you want your marriage to be better and stronger, and lasting, then work at it! It will be some of the funnest, greatest work you've ever done and it will be extremely rewarding!" You might say, "who made you an expert?" Well, I'm no expert but a week from tomorrow, on Monday the 19th Debbie and I will celebrate 41 years of marriage, and I love her more today than the day we got married and I was crazy about her then! And let me just say, she's the one who's had to do much of the work! I'm a handfull! I tell her I think she's the first Baptist being considered for sainthood in the Catholic Church for putting up with me! Sometimes I'll come home and we'll eat dinner and watch something on TV, and then I'll take my plate to the kitchen and start loading the dishwasher. I don't always do that, so sometimes, Debbie will say, "rough day of counseling?" To which I reply, "yeh, you know I need to help out more around the house, you don't get paid enough!" I guess I've had an advantage down through the years because of my counseling, because I get to learn from other people's mistakes. It breaks my heart to see people who don't see the benefit or value in truly working to build their marriage! We're going to have a three part series coming in about 4 weeks on marriage and family, called "It Starts at Home!". Stay tuned. This coming week I want you to ask yourself this question...

What are some of my unique abilities that I could put to work to build better relationships!

**3. The Third step in making the building block of responsibility is to start sharing!**

Did you hear that? Did someone just say, “come on honey, let’s go, I knew it, preacher’s fixin’ to ask for money!” No I’m not! If you’re man enough, hear me out! I’m talking about giving to others who have needs and especially when it comes to relationships! Paul said...

Ephesians 4:28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Our goal in personal responsibility, when it comes to relationships, should not only be to stop stealing and do our part, but we should also want to have an abundance so we can help others who, after having done all that they can do, still have a need. And there are so many times when there are others who truly do all they can, given their abilities and extenuating circumstances, and still end up lacking basic necessities. It could be a health reason, an unfortunate financial setback, a failed marriage, there’s many reasons. And then there are times when someone may have the basic necessities, but nothing more. Regardless, these are wonderful times for us to step up to the plate and do a little sharing! Giving to meet someone’s basic needs is a wonderful thing, but sometimes giving someone a little extra could be a blessing that gives them a pick-me-up they desperately needed! There’s at least two aspects of this sharing thing. There’s of course sharing with our neighbors, community members, church members, and even people in other places where there are literal needs like food, clothing, shelter, or financial. As a church, we’ve always felt it was our responsibility to help people in our own community and surrounding areas any time we could help in a healthy way. In other words, help not hurt, help not enable, help them get on a path back to well being. But we’ve also sensed a calling from the Lord to help in other places as well, like Haiti, and Mexico. As Great Commission Baptists, a part of our giving goes to support missionaries around the world! We are excited to be a part of that. We have very close ties to missionaries, not only in Haiti and Mexico, but in Africa and India as well. Some say we should only take care of folks here at home. To that I simply quote Jesus...

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

We’ve had people in the past who we’ve helped who sent a letter stating what our help had meant to them and that they were back on their feet and included a check to help someone else in need! But I want to tell you something that happened after Hurricane Katrina. We had done some mission work in Haiti at the House of Blessing Orphanage, but also I had done a concert at a school in Port Au Prince where some of those kids attended. When they heard about our building being flooded, along with the Bibles we had in the worship center for folks who didn’t have a Bible, the kids of that school took up hundreds of dollars and sent it to us to replace those Bibles! I told the head of the school we couldn’t take that from them. She said, you can’t not take it! It would break their hearts! So there’s that, literally giving to help someone with a tangible need! And sometimes it’s sharing to help someone be able to live and provide for themselves and their families. And sometimes it’s just about being willing to give out of your abundance, your overflow! When you’ve been super blessed, it’s such a blessing to share those

blessings. Let me ask the kids and the adults in this room a question: Do you ever have extra stuff that you don't use anymore and probably never will that you could bless someone else with? And sometimes it may be as simple as offering to share your extra candy with your brother or sister, or letting them play with some of your toys! In fact Paul had quoted Jesus on this when he had previously been with the Ephesian Church. It was in his farewell address to them...

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Have you ever thought about that statement in the context of your personal relationships? One of the most rewarding things in any relationship is in giving not taking! Like I said, we're going to be talking about family relationships in a few weeks! But let me just go ahead and say this, if your sole goal in a relationship is what you will get out of the relationship, what you stand to gain, how you might profit, if it's all about your wants, your needs, and your desires, then you're never going to have healthy relationships, ever!

When you have a servant heart you find that it's better when things are not all about me, myself and I! You'll find great joy in seeing great joy on other people's faces and in their lives! You'll want to build them up. I've seen way too many people who were in a relationship for what they could get from it rather than what they could bring to it and when they don't get what they want they will begin to destroy the other person. That happens in lots of relationships, but especially in marriages. And in a marriage, unless there's confession, true repentance, and forgiveness, there's going to be a train wreck. And here's the sad thing, the person who's in the relationship for what they can get out of it thinks the other person is the problem and they go off in search of someone else who they think can be all that they need. Here's the problem with that philosophy. You were born with a God shaped void in your heart and only God can fill that void. There's not a human being on the planet who can be God for you! The question is, how many broken relationships will you have to go through before you realize that truth? And that works on both sides of the equation and especially when both have a selfish, rather than a sharing mentality! The writer of Proverbs says...

Proverbs 11:24 One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

Proverbs 11:25 A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

And Paul told the Philippians...

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

Philippians 2:4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

The highest and most satisfying relationships are only found when you are willing to stop stealing, start working, and start sharing! And here's the amazing thing about sharing. When you

start sharing you'll find many times that others will want to do the same. And when there's mutual sharing and giving going on, relationships thrive!

This week I want you to ask yourself this question...

What are some ways I could begin helping others by sharing!

So how do we stop stealing, start working and start sharing? Paul gives us the short answer in Colossians 1:29...

Colossians 1:29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

If you'll let Him, Christ Jesus will allow His energy to powerfully work in you by way of The Holy Spirit! Then and only then will you be able to incorporate the building block of responsibility into your relationships! Let's pray!