

**Towards an
understanding
of Jesus'
relationships**

Christopher Pain



**JUBILEE
CENTRE**

A BIBLICAL VISION FOR SOCIETY

Towards an understanding of Jesus' relationships

Christopher Pain



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In Memory of David Pain

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1. Introduction

Relationships really matter

*'It is the quality of our relationships that, more than anything else, determines our happiness, fulfilment and the sense of a life well lived.'*¹

Relationships are fundamental to being human. In fact, our relationships define us far more than we, as individualistic Westerners like to admit. We declare, with admiration, someone to be 'Very much his/her own man/woman,' but it would be impossible to understand why they are the person they are without at least mentioning their parents, friends, teachers, colleagues and others who impacted their life. The same is true for each of us.

It is impossible to be human without being in relationship in some way and the relationships we have affect us profoundly. The story of Kamala and Amala, the Indian girls who were raised during their formative years by wolves, demonstrates this vividly. When discovered living wild with wolves the two girls, thought to have been aged about three and five, lived and behaved like wolves. They moved on all fours, ate only raw meat, were nocturnal in their habits and communicated through barks and growls. Unfortunately, Amala died relatively soon after being discovered, but, even so, had begun to respond and adapt to the new way of living that the humans around her encouraged. Similarly, Kamala, who lived nine years in the care of a Reverend Singh and his wife, adapted her behaviour and became able to speak in a basic fashion, accept other food and value human interaction. Their relationships with wolves, and then with humans, made them and then changed them.²

Given the impact of relationships on our lives, it is not surprising that they are of considerable interest to us. Celebrity magazines make millions in charting the tangled love lives of those most in the public eye. The

agony columns in newspapers and in men's and women's magazines demonstrate both the difficulty of getting relationships right and our desire for help to do so. Although the most recent statistics show that the number of people getting married has increased recently,³ there is still concern about the numbers of marriages that end in divorce and the impact that this has on the spouses involved and their children. Unfortunately, there is little consensus on how to improve things.

Furthermore, relationships underpin so much else, even when they are not specifically mentioned. When comment is made about the breakdown of society, it is the deterioration of the relationships that make up society that is actually being discussed.

Jesus prioritised relationships

For Christians, relationships should matter even more because, as will be seen, Jesus put relationships at the heart of all that he did. When asked to select the two greatest commandments Jesus picked out two kinds of relationship – our relationship with God and our relationship with our neighbour – and told us to 'love'.⁴ You cannot love someone unless you have a relationship with them and there is no higher relationship than one of love. However, love, like a priceless diamond, has many facets. Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind⁵ and to love our neighbours as ourselves.⁶ Both commands require love, but of different kinds.

Unpacking the full meaning of these terse statements is beyond the scope of this, and, indeed, any paper, but if Jesus thinks that the two greatest commandments involve love, then we can be sure that he thinks proper or right relationships are of ultimate importance. In fact, he goes on to make the astonishing claim that these two commandments provide a hermeneutical key for understanding all the Hebrew Scriptures. 'All

1 Dr Jonathan Sachs <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/>

2 <http://www.feralchildren.com/en/showchild.php?ch=kamala>

3 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1786428.stm>

4 Matt. 22:37

5 Matt. 22:37

6 Matt. 22:39

the law and the prophets⁷ hang⁸ or depend⁹ on them; this means that any part of the law and the prophets can be interpreted and applied in the light of this summary, which, fundamentally, is about relationships.

Jesus also tells us that relationships are central to our identity as his disciples. 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, *if you love one another*.'¹⁰ The defining mark of the Christian community should be the loving nature and quality of our relationships with each other. Even a moment's reflection allows us to realise that we still have much to learn about obeying this command, and much to repent of.

Implications

These initial observations highlight three areas for this study. First, given Jesus' teaching about the priority of relationships, we need to understand his relationships if we are to understand him. This paper will, therefore, make initial suggestions as to the method by which the gospel accounts can be studied so as to allow the development of as deep and clear an understanding of Jesus' relationships as possible.

Second, given that Jesus' summary of the law and the prophets focuses on relationships and that Jesus fulfils the law and the prophets,¹¹ we can expect to see the relational values of the Old Testament lived out perfectly in Jesus' relationships. This paper will therefore consider some of the ways in which this is evident in the relationships that are studied. To aid the reader, the Old Testament relational values, which will be identified in Chapter 4, will be highlighted in **bold** whenever they are discussed.

Third, we need to consider whether Jesus' relationships can be a model for us to learn from in our own practice of relationships, and this question will be addressed first, for much of the rest of the study hangs on it. If

Jesus' relationships can be a model, we need to consider what lessons we should learn.

Limitations

Although each of the three areas noted above could profitably be the subject of a more extensive study, this paper will make initial suggestions in respect of each one, in the hope that others may take up further study later on.

Furthermore, a full understanding of Jesus' relationships requires consideration of every incident and relationship recorded in the gospels, but this cannot be achieved here. For this reason our study of Jesus' individual relationships with humans will be limited to the short but relationally significant incident of the raising of Jairus's daughter, including the healing of the woman with haemorrhages, and Jesus' relationship with Peter. Study of the former allows us to consider the way in which Jesus handles multiple relationships and conflicting demands arising in a pressured and fluid situation; study of the latter enables us to consider a relationship in which Jesus invested significant time and effort.

Even consideration of a discrete relationship, such as Jesus' relationship with Peter, requires consideration of more material than can be covered here. For instance, every incident in which Peter was present listening to Jesus teach, but where he is not recorded as saying anything, would need to be considered to fully appreciate his relationship with Jesus. Again, lack of space and time prevents this, but lessons can still be learnt from a less extensive study.

A full understanding of Jesus' relationships requires consideration of every incident and relationship recorded in the gospels

7 Matt. 22:40

8 NIV

9 NRSV

10 John 13:35 TNIV

11 Matt. 5:17

2. Can Jesus' relationships be a model for us?

When Jesus meets Peter in the first encounter recorded between them in the gospels, Jesus looks at him (whom he had more than likely met before, see below) and says 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas.'¹² Jesus' renaming of Simon played a significant role in their relationship, which we will comment on further below, but the way that John reports this incident raises significant questions about the nature of Jesus' knowledge.

It seems likely that the 'look' reported in this verse is intended to give us an image of Jesus carefully evaluating Peter and this evaluation leading to the bestowal of a new name. However, John probably also intends us to understand Jesus' depth of understanding of Peter obtained from this look as being, at least in part, supernatural, as the rest of John Chapter 1 makes clear.

The next verses record Nathaniel's approach to Jesus and here Jesus displays remarkable insight into Nathaniel's character. As he sees Nathaniel approaching he comments 'Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.'¹³ A clearly surprised Nathaniel replies 'How do you know me?' suggesting that he at least recognizes that description of himself, albeit that it is one with which he is unlikely to disagree. The exchange that follows between them in vv48b–50 demonstrates that Jesus' knowledge of Nathaniel was supernatural rather than natural,¹⁴ which suggests that Jesus' knowledge of Peter is of the same kind. This fits with John's editorial comment in 2:24–25, verses that are clearly intended to establish Jesus' unique knowledge; knowledge that derives from who Jesus is and his unique relationship with the Father. Many commentators find echoes of 1 Kings

8:39¹⁵ or Jeremiah 17:10,¹⁶ and also of Rabbinic teaching that what was in the heart of a neighbour was one of the seven things hidden from humans.¹⁷ This is an implicit claim for the divinity of Jesus and describes the kind of Messiah that he is.

Bultmann correctly observes that 'The Johannine Jesus is not however portrayed as a prophet, but in his omniscience he is more like the θειος άνθρωπος¹⁸...whose miraculous knowledge is not based on the gift of God which has to be constantly renewed, but on his own personal divinity... Jesus' omniscience is not based on any particular talents which enhance his humanity, but on his unity with God, which he enjoys in his full humanity.'¹⁹

That is not to say that there is no hint of Jesus as a prophet, or as a thinking, reflective human being in John's gospel. For instance, his comments at the beginning of Chapter 14 'Do not let your hearts be troubled' are most naturally read as Jesus' response to an evaluation of his disciples' reactions to all that he has told them in Chapter 13. Elsewhere we see that Jesus' actions are frequently interpreted as being those of a prophet.²⁰ Although this conclusion is portrayed as erroneous in John, for Jesus is much more than a prophet, it does not deny that his actions and gifting were in some way prophetic.

Understanding how Jesus acquires the knowledge that he displays has important implications for our understanding of how Jesus conducts his relationships, and the extent to which and the ways in which we can emulate his approach. Clearly, we can never possess knowledge that relies on the divine unity with the Father and the Spirit that Jesus enjoyed. On the other

12 John 1:42

13 John 1:47

14 Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, IVP: 1991) p161–2, Brown, R. E. *The Gospel according to John (I–XII) (The Anchor Bible)* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1966) p83.

15 Morris, L. *The Gospel According to John – New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1995) p183.

16 Bernard, J. H. *St. John – The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh, Clark: 1948) p99; Brown, *John I–XII* p127; Carson, *John*, p184.

17 Morris, *John*, p183; Carson, *John*, p184.

18 'Divine man'.

19 Bultmann, R. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, (Oxford, Blackwell: 1971) p102.

20 John 4:19; 4:44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17

hand, Jesus calls us to a deep and profound unity with him²¹ and makes a remarkable promise about our doing greater works than he did, although always on the basis of our unity with him and with his Father.²² Moreover, we cannot neglect the natural gifts at our disposal; Jesus used his in evaluating Peter, as we have seen. Similarly his words of comfort in John 14:1ff are most naturally interpreted as being prompted by his observation of the faces of his disciples. Jesus also commands us to steward the gifts given to us²³ and the rest of the New Testament reinforces this teaching.²⁴

Nor must we ignore the fact that Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism and that the gospel writers all acknowledge the role that he plays in directing Jesus' ministry. Luke is particularly interested in this theme and frequently presents Jesus as empowered by the Spirit, a theme that he continues in Acts as he traces the Spirit's work through the early Church. John records Jesus' significant promises about the future blessing that the Spirit will bring to the disciples (and us).²⁵ The implication is that empowered by the same Spirit it is possible to imitate Jesus.

At this point, we will briefly examine the other gospels' portrayal of Jesus' knowledge of people. Although an excursus from our present study, it is vital for this study, and future studies of Jesus' other relationships, that we see what perspective the other gospels give us to complement our understanding from a brief study of John.

Luke also appears to have a theme of Jesus having supernatural insight:

'The theme's consistency in Luke suggests more than natural perception, as does the use of ἐπιγνους (*epignous*) which means he 'knew fully' their thoughts. At the least, Jesus operates like a prophet. Jesus' description of his authority in 5:24 as tied to the Son of Man suggests someone who is more than a prophet.'²⁶

However, commentators are divided over what Luke's intention is at the various points where Jesus displays (at least) remarkable insight.²⁷ Three basic conclusions are drawn:

1. Jesus is perceptive and uses natural insight – i.e. observes the faces of others.
2. Jesus is given prophetic understanding by the Holy Spirit.
3. Jesus has divine understanding of the kind represented in John (and mediated by the Holy Spirit).²⁸

This is not the place to attempt to resolve these debates, if indeed they can be resolved. However, we must note that all three are suggested by Luke and they should not be viewed as contradictory. The fact that Jesus possesses knowledge stemming from his divinity does not overwhelm or deny the reality of his human talents or prophetic gifting. If it did, his essential humanity and the reality of the incarnation would be denied. Rather, his divinity means that his knowledge is frequently beyond what we might attain or even understand. However, this is no reason for us to neglect to seek the kind of sensitivity to people's needs, penetrating evaluation and Spirit-given prophetic insight we also see Jesus display in his relationships. Luke also places high emphasis on Jesus' prayer life, as a source of his spiritual 'power'. Jesus' ability in relationships is, therefore, in some part dependent upon his relationship with his Father through prayer. Luke also records Jesus' explicit teaching that his disciples 'should pray and not give up'.²⁹

Matthew's view of Jesus' knowledge is sufficiently summarised for our purposes as being similar to Luke's. His frequent references (explicit or implicit) to Jesus knowing people's thoughts point in the direction of Jesus' divinity³⁰ or at least supernatural knowledge,³¹ but there are occasions when Jesus' own perception and sensitivity to others is sufficient to explain his insight.

Mark has the 'lowest' view of Jesus' knowledge. Although in 2:8 Jesus has supernatural knowledge of

21 e.g. in John 15

22 John 14:12, 13 – we have to ask 'in his name'.

23 Luke 12:48b and Matt. 25:14–30

24 e.g. 1 Cor. 10:15 and Heb. 4:13

25 John 14:16–18, 26; 16:13–15

26 Bock, D. L. *Luke 1:1–9:50 – Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books: 1994) p484. Commenting here on Luke 5:22.

27 e.g. Luke 6:8, 9:47, 11:17

28 Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, p484.

29 Luke 18:1

30 See Keener, C. S. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1999) p291 and Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 1–13 – Word Biblical Commentary Vol 33a* (Dallas, Word: 1993).

31 Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 1–13 – Word Biblical Commentary Vol 33a* (Dallas, Word: 1993).

the thoughts of the teachers of the law, his ability in this area is 'not made as explicit in Mark as often as in the other gospels (but see 5:30, 12:15)'.³²

In acknowledging Jesus as being unique in his divinity, we must recognize that his character and activity that flows from this is beyond our emulation. However, he is still the one whom we are to imitate.³³ It is helpful in this context to consider N.T. Wright's thoughts on how it was that Jesus was aware of his own vocation:

'Jesus did not, in other words, "know that he was God" in the same way that one knows one is male or female, hungry or thirsty, or that one ate an orange an hour ago. His "knowledge" was of a more risky, but perhaps more significant sort: like knowing one is loved. One cannot "prove" it except by living it.'³⁴

He continues:

'I propose, as a matter of history, that Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of a vocation: a vocation, given him by the one he knew as "father", to enact in himself, what, in Israel's Scriptures, God has promised to accomplish all by himself. He would be the pillar of cloud and fire for the people of the new exodus. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God.'³⁵

We should therefore understand Jesus as thinking and reflective³⁶ both in his humanity and in his divinity, rather than as someone who simply 'did' without conscious thought.

This allows us to imitate him and use both the natural gifts that he gives us, and the supernatural or prophetic gifts which he also bestows by the Holy Spirit, in order

to conduct our relationships. Whilst we must acknowledge that we will never be able to relate in the way that he did, we should be careful not to set our sights too low and must seek to learn all that we can from his practice of relationships.

For instance, if we were to take Jesus' command to love our neighbour as ourselves seriously, how might it transform our relationships? We commonly think of this as an injunction to act in particular ways: to assist people in need, or be 'nice' or have warm feelings towards someone else in some undefined way. The command goes much wider and deeper than this.

If we truly loved our neighbour in this way, we would be focused on them and their needs in our interactions. If we really loved the people we relate to by giving *full* attention to them, how much better might our understanding of their character and needs be? We could then better judge how to relate to them in a way that was meaningful to them, rather than in the way that suits us? We would also be more able to assess their current mood or concerns from their body language or tone of voice more accurately and so be able to respond to the needs they may be expressing without using words. Communication in this other-centred way requires a denial of self in line with Jesus' command to all those who would follow him.³⁷ If we combined this with fervent prayer and expectancy that the Father would equip us by his Spirit to relate to others in this way and even empower us with insight and knowledge beyond our natural understanding, how different our relationships could be.

If we truly loved our neighbour we would be focused on them and their needs in our interactions

32 France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* – *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, Eerdmans: 2002) p126.

33 1 Cor. 11:1, 1 Thess. 1:6

34 Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London, SPCK: 1996) p653.

35 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p653.

36 Wright, N. T. *The Challenge of Jesus* (London, SPCK: 2000) p52.

37 Matt. 16:24

3. How should we study Jesus' relationships?

(Part 1)

Having established that Jesus' conduct of relationships is a model for us to learn from and imitate, we need to identify the appropriate method(s) for studying his relationships. In order to do so, we need to think clearly about how people in general, including Jesus, relate. In this chapter we will consider various models and research concerning the study of relationships. In the next chapter we will consider hermeneutical issues and how to handle the biblical text.

Webs of relationships

Any relationship takes place in the context of other relationships and is impacted by them:

'Reality is composed of nested relationships – wholes within wholes (holons), each one having its own integrity yet without integrity unless part of the larger wholes within which each is embedded. In this holographic witness [sic] of creation, everything is revealed as relationship. There are not parts, only participants. Isolate anything from the web of relationships, and it ceases to exist. "Existence is co-existence" is how Jewish theologian Abraham Herschel put it.'³⁸

So, a primary relationship may dictate the way that we behave in all other relationships. Any particular relationship will be conducted in front of different people at different times, and may be conducted differently over time as a result. Our study of Jairus will particularly consider Jesus' response to this reality of webbed or nested relationships.

The purposes of relationships

The reasons or purposes for having a particular relationship are also important to consider.

'Can we establish a single criterion of goodness or badness which would be relevant for all interpersonal relationships?... Obviously not. We have to ask: "good for what?" As a starting analytic point let us say that all interpersonal relationships are oriented towards some primary goal, that is, some goal or function whose presence is necessary for the relationship to exist and whose absence would seriously undermine it?''³⁹

However, the fact that all relationships have a primary purpose does not mean they are merely a means to an end, for the goal of the relationship can be the sustaining of the relationship itself, but what is required to sustain it still needs to be made clear. Our study of Jesus and Peter will particularly consider Jesus' understanding of purpose in that relationship.

The relational proximity model

Various models are available to us for studying relationships: 'Psychological models focus on personality. Sociological models on power. Management models on process. Economic models on price.'⁴⁰ The relational proximity model, which has been significant in the thinking of the Jubilee Centre for many years, identifies a set of preconditions or dimensions necessary for good relationships to exist.

The five dimensions of the relational proximity model have their root in a sociological assessment of the Old Testament law and the kinds of outcomes that it promotes. For instance, an assessment of the Jubilee law concerning return of land to families⁴¹ demonstrates a concern for:

- Economic equality (which is closely related to power), because the primary means of production is redistributed more or less equally.

38 Sweet, L. *Jesus Drives Me Crazy: Lose Your Mind, Find Your Soul*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2003) p105.

39 Bennis, W. G., Berlew, D. E., Schein, E. H. & Steele, F. I. (eds.) *Interpersonal Dynamics: Essays and Readings on Human Interactions* (3rd Edition) (Homewood, Illinois, Dorsey Press: 1973) cited in Lee D. J. 'The Good Relationship', (The Relationships Foundation, Cambridge: 1996, Unpublished) p6.

40 Ashcroft. J. *Articles on Relational Proximity* (Cambridge, Relationships Foundation: 2006, Unpublished.) p1.

41 See Lev. 25:8ff

- Stability of relationships, because families are bought together on the land and are near to those who have held the neighbouring plots for generations. This means that people are physically close and able to associate over a long period.
- Shared goals, because all the family live on the land and this is their means of earning a living, they share an interest in working the land together.

An assessment of the requirement for the various feasts indicates, *inter alia*: a concern for the wider community to share a common identity and purpose, because they are brought together and affirm that they are the people of YHWH; and, the importance of sharing different activities together, including celebration and commemoration. These examples could be multiplied many times over.

The five dimensions of Relational Proximity that result from this kind of analysis are: ⁴²

Directness

Directness assesses the quality of a communication process and its suitability to the relationship in view. For instance, if I wish to buy car insurance, I do not necessarily need to meet someone face to face. In fact, I may consider it preferable not to do so, and to use the phone or even the internet instead. Similarly, the company trying to sell insurance to me may prefer that I use the phone or internet, to help drive down their costs. From both parties' perspectives face-to-face communication is unnecessary in that particular relationship. However, everyday experience indicates the importance of direct or face-to-face contact for other kinds of relationships; we travel to see friends in distant towns and tend to negotiate significant business deals in person rather on the phone. We recognise that face-to-face encounters give the greatest potential for high quality communication in which we can really encounter the other person. This level of encounter is important if we are to experience love in a friendship or build trust in a business relationship.

Having said that, meeting face to face does not guarantee the quality of communication. It is possible to be physically present but not to engage in an encounter; we can hide our real selves, use deception or allow our attention to wander elsewhere. For the best possible communication to take place there needs to be face-to-face communication leading to emotional and intellectual engagement as the parties are honest with each other and seek to understand what is being communicated as well as communicating themselves.

Continuity

Continuity measures shared time over time because it takes time to get know people. If your best friend called you now and invited you to their wedding tomorrow, at which they planned to marry a person they had met one hour ago, you would, quite rightly, be likely to wonder whether they were not acting too hastily. Such a short meeting would seem unlikely to provide the knowledge needed to make a decision to be together for the rest of one's life.

We need different levels of contact for the kind of relationship being built – too much or too little can be destructive. We also need to feel stable in a relationship for it to flourish and shared history, or continuity, helps that process. In a crisis, whether business or personal, we are more likely to turn to someone who has helped us previously or known us for a long time than to a new acquaintance.

Multiplexity

Multiplexity describes the breadth of knowledge in a relationship. For instance, playing sport with someone once a week for a year results in a relationship on one level, but it tells little about who they are as a parent or what their values are. In fact, if someone plays sport or conducts a similar activity for that long, they are more than likely to try and spend time with that other person in a different context.

In a work context it obviously helps us to relate better to colleagues and clients if we can understand something of their role in the organisation, the other pressures and challenges that they face, the skills that they possess outside of the ones displayed in our relationship and what their aims and values are. Team-building days, social events and similar activities are examples of ways in which multiplexity, especially in business relationships, can be built.

Parity

Parity considers the distribution of power, risk and reward in a relationship. Every relationship involves power differentials. The Chief Executive clearly has more power than a junior manager. This is necessary for the organisation to function. But for a good relationship to exist between the two, that power must be used properly. Does the CEO allow proper input from those below her before making decisions? Is that input properly considered and the reasons for ignoring/rejecting it explained? If so, the junior

42 For more information on these indicators see Schluter and Lee, *The R Factor*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton: 1993) pp68–92 and Schluter and Lee, *The R Option*, (Cambridge, The Relationships Foundation: 2003) pp52–61.

manager is likely to feel that their contribution is valued in the relationship. If the junior manager and the CEO are treated by the same standards and the risks and rewards of their relationship with each other, and with the company, are fairly distributed then their relationship has a better chance of being a good one. Such parity is more likely to be achieved when both parties are committed to the relationship.

Commonality

Commonality involves working with similarity and difference. Almost by definition, we will share some commonality with our friends; we associate with them because we share similar ideals and interests and are seeking similar or compatible goals from our relationship. In a good relationship we will also be able to resolve differences and disagreements so that they

add richness to our relationship and take joint responsibility for doing so.

In a work environment, we may work simply because we want the money, but those who share their employer's vision or interest in their field are likely to have a better relationship with them and their fellow employees than those who do not.

Since these dimensions are rooted in Old Testament values, we would expect to see them present in Jesus' relationships. For this reason, and also because Jesus' relationships have not been studied in the light of this model previously, it will be the primary model used in this paper. A specific analysis of the relationships of Jesus using these dimensions will be made at the end of each section.

4. How should we study Jesus' relationships?

(Part 2)

Having considered various models that can be used to study the biblical material, it is necessary to consider issues more specifically related to the biblical text.

Hermeneutical considerations in studying Jesus' relationships

Studying Jesus' practice of relationships is, in many ways, harder than studying his teaching. Broadly speaking, the gospels aim to demonstrate that Jesus was the Son of God and worthy of following – they do not seek to present a complete picture of his relationships. Only glimpses of Jesus' personal, private interactions are seen. Even when his public ministry is reported, it is often in brief terms that are not intended to give the details needed to fully understand the relationship in view. Nevertheless, there is material available and part of the difficulty in studying it may spring from our own lack of relational sensitivity and perception. This section describes some of the elements necessary for a fruitful study of Jesus' relationships.

Jesus in context

Historical context

From a twenty-first-century perspective much of the way that Jesus relates looks strange and unusual, but was it necessarily so in the first century? For each relationship that is studied, it is necessary, so far as possible, to understand how Jesus' contemporaries would have viewed his actions. For instance, how far were his actions with Peter comparable with those of other Rabbis of his day? This historical information will be introduced as appropriate.

Old Testament context

Jesus needs to be understood in his religious context, especially that he was a first-century Jew who would have been born and raised steeped in the values of the Old Testament. These values inevitably shaped the way that he conducted his relationships for they are

relational values. That is, they are only capable of being lived out and expressed in relationship with others. As noted, Jesus summarised them by saying that they were about love for God and love for neighbour, which for Jesus defines right relationships. They set out what it meant to live a good life. Unless these values are understood, Jesus' words, actions and relationships cannot be fully appreciated.

To develop this understanding we will consider the Old Testament and attempt working definitions of the relational values it promotes. There is danger in this task, for God, rather than one of the values that will be identified, is the underlying principle of Old Testament values and ethics.⁴³ Furthermore, the ethical content of the values we will identify is contained not just in the didactic passages but also in narrative, poetry and wisdom literature; both these realities make exhaustive definition impossible. Furthermore, these values or principles that we identify are not canonical or normative: 'The Bible itself remains the norm.'⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the task of interpretation requires recognition of these shortcomings and working definitions to be constructed in any event.

Working definitions of Old Testament relational values

The Old Testament social and ethical vision for relationships is found in the person of God and his character. The principles that we will identify here are more appropriately designated as 'middle values',⁴⁵ with each providing insight into the whole. Moreover, these values themselves are not discrete, but frequently overlap so that it is often difficult to know where one ends and another begins. They need to be understood in context with each other.

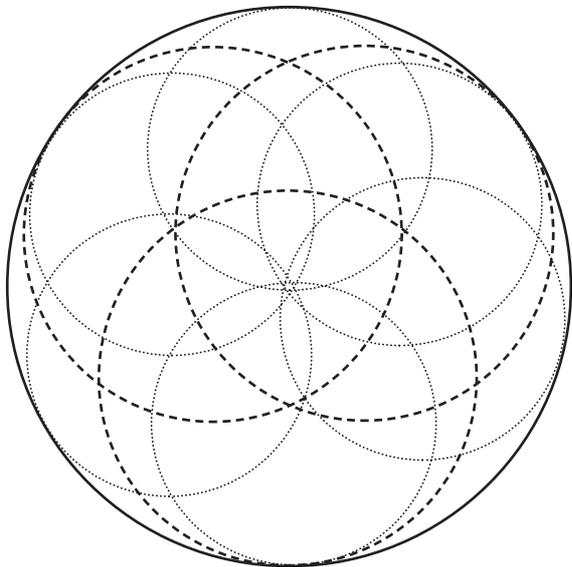
The Old Testament social and ethical vision for relationships is found in the person of God and his character

43 Bruckner, J. K. 'Ethics', in Baker, D. W. and Alexander T. D. (eds.) *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester, IVP: 2003) pp224–240, 225.

44 Wright, C. J. H. 'The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part II' in *TynBul* 43.2 (1992) pp203–231 (207).

45 Bruckner, Ethics, p228.

It might be represented diagrammatically, as in Figure 1, where the outer circle represents God and his character as revealed in the Old Testament, and the dotted circles represent the 'middle values' that we can (partially) define in order to help us understand the whole. The larger heavier circles represent the more important middle values such as righteousness, justice and loving-kindness:



Key

- = God's character revealed in O.T.
- ⊖ = Especially significant 'middle values'
- ⊘ = Other 'middle values'

Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the relationship between God's character revealed in the Old Testament and the relational values also revealed

Having recognised the complex relationship between the values, we will now attempt definitions, beginning with the most significant values first. Again the nature of these values means that the ranking is not to be treated absolutely, but some values are clearly mentioned more frequently in the Old Testament than others. Finally, although these values do not necessarily have the same prominence in each period of the life of Israel and revelation of their meaning is progressive, we will be considering the Old Testament in its final redacted form and so understanding these values as they stood 'at the end of the redaction

process';⁴⁶ the very place from which Jesus would have been instructed in and understood them.

Loving-kindness (*ḥsd*)

Appearing over 240 times in the Old Testament, this is a dynamic word that has no exact correspondent in English. It is variously translated loving-kindness, loyalty, loyal-love, mercy and sometimes compassion. It is his *ḥsd* that causes God to make his covenant with Israel (loving-kindness, mercy) and to maintain it even as she spurns him (loving-kindness, loyal-love and mercy).⁴⁷ 'In general, [*ḥsd*] refers to the obligation assumed by one person to act on behalf of another, who is usually dependent on the aid of the first and helpless to function adequately without it.'⁴⁸

Israel was expected to show *ḥsd* back to God (see especially Hosea) and to act with *ḥsd* towards one another, particularly in the context of reciprocal favours⁴⁹ and in caring for the vulnerable. For example, Boaz acts with *ḥsd* towards Ruth and Naomi who were both vulnerable and tied to him by family relation.⁵⁰ *Ḥsd* not only underpins the Covenant and describes the character of God, but also underpins the requirement for 'dutiful generosity... an important foundation for welfare provision'⁵¹ and the proper functioning of Israelite society.

Wenham comments:

'Loyalty within the family and to one's neighbours was so taken for granted that the law hardly bothers to mention it except in a situation where loyalty to God must take precedence (Deuteronomy 13:7–11). But the Psalms (e.g. 15) and Proverbs (e.g. chs 2–6) often celebrate those loyal to their neighbours, and frequently paint the wicked as those who sit loose to their obligations to their fellow men.'⁵²

God declares and expands *ḥsd* as 'the central feature of his name, his promises and his active reputation (Exodus 20:5–6; 34:6–7; Numbers 14:17–19; Deuteronomy 5:9–10; 7:9–13'⁵³ and so 'imitation of

46 Burnside, J. P. *The Signs of Sin*, (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press: 2003) p9.

47 Towner, P. H. 'Mercy / Compassion' in Alexander, T. D. & Rosner, B. S. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed.). (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2001).

48 Tate, M. E. *Psalms 51–100 – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Ed.) (Dallas: Word, Incorporated: 2002) p13.

49 See Josh. 2:12

50 Ruth 2:20

51 Ashcroft, J. 'The Relational Dynamic' in Schluter, M. & Ashcroft, J. *The Jubilee Manifesto* (Leicester, IVP: 2005) p113.

52 Wenham G. J. 'The Gap Between Law and Ethics in the Bible' in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 48 (1997) pp17–29, 26.

53 Bruckner, Ethics, p228.

the ʔsd of God is considered the central theme of Jewish ethics.⁵⁴

Righteousness (ʔdq)

Of all the words used to describe the social vision of the Old Testament, ʔdq is perhaps the most explicitly about relationships.

‘In order for a person to be [righteous]... he or she must exist and live in a manner which allows him or her to respond correctly to the values of the relationship [which may include relationships of spouse, parent, judge, worker, friend etc.]... In essence then ʔdq is not simply an objective norm which is present within society, and which must be kept, but rather it is a concept which derives its meaning from the relationship in which it finds itself.’⁵⁵

Narrative and case-studies are so important in Old Testament ethical teaching

It may be conceived of as acting rightly – never in an abstract sense, but in response to the relationship(s) in view. This is part of the reason why narrative and case-studies are so important in Old Testament ethical teaching; one learns how to act righteously by seeing how others have done so and applying the lessons learnt.⁵⁶

That is not to say that righteousness is a shifting value dependent on the prevailing ethics in the relationships of the time, for it is ultimately YHWH who is righteous⁵⁷ and Israel’s righteousness is obeying his laws⁵⁸ and so staying faithful to the Covenant.⁵⁹

Inevitably, because this word is so broad, other values that we see will be encompassed by it. Its importance in the study of Jesus’ relationships is to highlight the significance of considering who Jesus is relating to, for acting righteously is clearly context and relationship-sensitive.

Justice (ʔpt)

ʔpt and ʔdq are intimately interwoven in the Old Testament and frequently appear as a hendiadys of ‘righteousness and justice’ or ‘justice and righteousness’. The root ʔpt and the words that come from it cover ‘judicial activity at every level’⁶⁰ but also become more dynamic and define the action required in a given situation to achieve ʔdq.⁶¹

Weinfeld notes that in the royal domain ‘...the execution of righteousness and justice...refers primarily to acts on behalf of the poor and less fortunate classes of the people.’⁶² The poor are frequently denied their rights (injustice) and the nature of the leader’s relationship to the poor requires him or her to provide justice for them if he or she is to be righteous.

He also comments:

‘The prophet Ezekiel, in referring to the individual ‘righteous man’ who *performs righteousness and justice*, mentions that he refrains from oppression, from seizing pledges, from theft, from usury and from performing injustice (Ezekiel 18:7–8, 12–13, 16–17). But this is insufficient. The ideal of *performing justice and righteousness* is not confined to the abstention from evil; it consists primarily in doing good: giving bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked. Ezekiel 18:7, 16)’⁶³

Justice, like righteousness, is concerned with behaving in a way that is ‘right’ for the relationship in view. Again, that does not make justice arbitrary and dependent on shifting social norms. Rather, what is right in any situation is to be understood from YHWH’s perspective. so that Proverbs 28:5 tells us ‘Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek YHWH understand it fully.’ Understanding how to live in right relationships of justice and righteousness with our fellow humans requires that we have a right relationship with YHWH.

54 Bruckner, Ethics, p228.

55 Gossai, H. ‘Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets’, American University Studies, Series 7: Theology and Religion Vol. 141 (New York, Peter Lang, 1993) p55–56 cited in Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p 256.

56 cf Burnside, *Signs of Sin* pp16ff.

57 Isa. 45:24

58 Deut. 6:25

59 Wright, N. T. ‘Righteousness’ in Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. *New Dictionary of Theology* (electronic ed.) (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press: 2000) p592.

60 Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p256.

61 Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p257.

62 Weinfeld, M. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem, Magnes Press: 2000) p10.

63 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, p18.

Holiness

YHWH is holy⁶⁴ and all other holiness derives from him. Israel is to be holy because YHWH is,⁶⁵ but it is YHWH himself who sanctifies Israel and makes her holy.⁶⁶ Other aspects of holiness, such as the laws concerning ritual purity, were essential prerequisites in achieving holiness (for without them no-one could approach God) but it was the presence of God in their midst that made Israel holy.⁶⁷ The prophets were critical of those who thought that they could approach God with legally correct (outwardly holy) sacrifices, but neglect right living (such as acting with justice) in other areas.⁶⁸

The laws on holiness also encompassed a bold vision for society.⁶⁹ The idea of being set apart for the service of God carried the idea of mission, of blessing others, for Israel's conformity to God's holiness was intended to bless the nations.⁷⁰

For individuals, holiness is conferred by God and requires active co-operation in obeying his commands. Psalm 24:2–3 sees holiness as requiring clean hands, a pure heart and unswerving commitment to God.

Faithfulness and Truthfulness (*mûnâ & met*)

God's faithfulness and his *ḥsd* are closely linked.⁷¹ Faithfulness is crucial in describing God's commitment to Israel and defined their relationship. Even in the midst of horrendous trials that might have led some to question God's concern for Israel, Lamentations 3:22 affirms 'great is your faithfulness'. Moreover, Israel is required to be faithful too:

'...“faith” and “faithfulness” define the *sine qua non* of the God/people relationship. Indeed, the biblical writers exploit a number

of images and metaphors to elucidate this trust-shaped relationship: marriage; father and son; king and people; parties to a covenant; to name only the most prominent.⁷²

Faithfulness is also expected in interpersonal relationships. In Proverbs 3:3–4 love and faithfulness 'win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man'. Ashcroft comments: 'The value placed upon faithfulness has social implications... [It] is an important aspect of trustworthiness and hence the foundation of the trust which is essential for efficient economic and political relationships.'⁷³

Faithfulness of this kind also requires truthfulness and in Hebrew thought the word frequently translated 'truth' or 'truthfulness' is almost interchangeable with faithfulness. Whilst we tend to think of truth as being primarily concerned with propositional accuracy, Hebrew thought emphasised the requirement to be 'true' in character and in the relationships that one has,⁷⁴ a requirement that encompasses propositional truth, but which is wider and more flexible.

Love

For Christians this is the cardinal value – it motivated the Father to send the Son into the world⁷⁵ and, as we have seen, Jesus declares love for God and love for neighbour as the key to understanding the law and the prophets.⁷⁶ The Old Testament words for love are as semantically broad as the English ('I love marmite' and 'I love you' said to one's spouse carry rather different connotations.) At its highest, however, 'love [whether human or divine] is the deepest possible expression of the personality and of the closeness of personal relations.'⁷⁷ It motivates right actions, but requires an inner attitude to match.

64 Lev. 20:3; 22:2, 32

65 Lev. 11:45, 19:2, 20:7

66 Exod. 31:13; Lev. 20:8

67 Bruckner, *Ethics*, p226.

68 Brower, K. E. 'Holiness' in Wood, D. R. W. & I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. electronic ed. of 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press: 1996) p478. See, for example, Isa. 1:10–20 & Amos 5.

69 Ashcroft, *The Relational Dynamic*, p108.

70 Bruckner, *Ethics*, p226. See Gen. 12:3, Exod. 19:5–6, Deut. 7:6.

71 See Deut. 7:9

72 Taylor, S. S. 'Faith, Faithfulness' in Alexander, T. D. & Rosner, B. S. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed.). (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press: 2001).

73 Ashcroft, *The Relational Dynamic*, p114.

74 Palmer, F. H. 'Truth' in Wood, D. R. W. & I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary* electronic ed. of 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press: 1996) p1213.

75 John 3:16

76 Matt. 22:38–40

77 Palmer, F. H. 'Love, Beloved' in Wood, D. R. W. & I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary* electronic ed. of 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press: 1996) p700.

Mercy / Compassion (*ḥnn/rḥm*)

We have already noted that mercy is used to translate *ḥsd*, perhaps most famously in Micah 6:8. But these other words and ideas supplement *ḥsd*. *ḥnn* describes the act of having mercy upon someone, of being gracious. *rḥm* is the word translated 'tender mercies' by the KJV.⁷⁸ 'It expresses the affective aspect of love: its compassion and pity.'⁷⁹ In order to show mercy, compassion and, therefore, emotional identification with the one to whom mercy will be shown, is a prerequisite.

Humility

Moses is the supreme Old Testament example of humility⁸⁰ and it was this humility that enabled him to speak with God face to face.⁸¹ It is primarily in relation to God that humility was urged in the Old Testament, although Proverbs 25:6–7 begins to apply the idea of humility horizontally. Although there is little positive command to be humble towards fellow humans, the destructive effects of pride upon relationships are so well documented in prophetic, narrative and wisdom literature, that the sensitive reader would have recognised the wisdom of humility towards both God and man.⁸²

Forgiveness

'God's willingness to forgive, and the need for his people to seek forgiveness are prominent themes throughout the Old Testament's historical books'⁸³ and significant sections of the law focused upon the process for obtaining it through the sacrificial system. David captured the wonder of being forgiven by YHWH when he said 'Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.'⁸⁴

However, the need for forgiveness in human relationships receives far less attention. Whilst it is implicit in many of the ideals of living in shalom and righteousness, it is never held up as a command. Individuals with troubled consciences request it (e.g. Joseph's brothers, apparently at their Father's behest,⁸⁵) and Joseph's granting of it is implicitly approved. Leviticus 19:18 proscribes taking vengeance and holding grudges, but this is only part of what it would mean to imitate God's forgiveness.⁸⁶

Hope

'Although hope is clearly associated with various Hebrew roots, the concept is present in many Old Testament texts even when these roots are absent. For this reason, it is important to look beyond the distribution of specific vocabulary when assessing the importance of hope in the Old Testament. Fundamentally, Yahweh himself is the theological ground of human hope in the Old Testament.'⁸⁷

The importance of hope in human relationships should not be underestimated either. For although never given explicit mention, the laws of Israel required that those in positions of despair should always be given hope. Financially stricken Israelites forced to sell themselves into slavery knew that it was limited to seven years;⁸⁸ if they had to sell their land, then they or their heirs retained hope, expecting its return in the year of Jubilee.⁸⁹ Similarly the role of the kinsman-redeemer obliges him to give hope.⁹⁰

Patience

YHWH describes himself as being slow to anger.⁹¹ This characteristic becomes a point of praise for Israel⁹² and a bedrock in their relationship with YHWH as they

78 e.g. Ps. 25:6 where it appears alongside God's *ḥsd*.

79 Hoad, J. W. L. 'Mercy, Merciful' in Wood, D. R. W. & I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary* electronic ed. of 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press: 1996) p751.

80 Num. 12:3

81 See Num. 12

82 See e.g. Prov. 11:2; 13:10; 29:23

83 Yarbrough, R. W. 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation' in Alexander, T. D. & B. S. Rosner. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press: 2001)..

84 Ps. 32:1

85 Gen. 50:17

86 Contra Wenham G. J. 'The Gap Between Law and Ethics in the Bible' in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 48 (1997) pp17–29, 27.

87 Elliot, M. W. 'Hope' in Alexander, T. D. & B. S. Rosner. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press: 2001).

88 Deut. 15:1–8

89 Lev. 25:10ff

90 Ashcroft, *The Relational Dynamic*, p115.

91 Exod. 34:6

92 Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8

rely on this patience to keep them from experiencing his righteous anger.⁹³

The wise man imitates YHWH in the way that he deals with his fellow men and the idea is often expressed in Hebrew as being 'slow to anger'.⁹⁴ The idea of being 'slow to anger' is helpful for us to hold in mind, for such patience (as we would now express it) is not passivity,⁹⁵ but a choice to wait before expressing legitimate anger or frustration.

Generosity

We have already noted that *ʔsd* underpins the requirement for dutiful generosity but it is helpful to spell this out. Wenham, again, helps us:

'...God is not simply loyal, he is generous. His generosity is patent in Genesis 1–2. Further generosity is shown in his election of Israel, his gift of the land and all the blessings repeatedly promised to the nation and individuals. Israel is expected to be similarly generous. This is one of the great themes of Deuteronomy. Israel must respond to God's generosity by giving herself to God in loyalty and service. Generosity must characterise human relationships too. Thus loans must be given, even if there is little hope of their repayment. Manumitted slaves must be given a golden handshake (Deuteronomy 15:7–18). "The righteous [person] is ever giving liberally and lending" (Psalm 37:26).'⁹⁶

Honouring others

This attitude is most notably required by the Fifth Commandment of (adult)⁹⁷ children in relation to parents, but also by servants to masters.⁹⁸ The righteous man of Psalm 15 honours those who fear the Lord. Of course, ultimately it is God who has the primary claim to all honour. Proverbs urges this to be done from the

firstfruits⁹⁹ and notes that those who help the poor honour God too.¹⁰⁰

'To "give honor" to father and mother means more than to be subject to them, or respectful of their wishes: they are to be given precedence by the recognition of the importance which is theirs by right, esteemed for their priority, and loved for it as well. As Yahweh is honored for his priority to all life, so father and mother must be honored for their priority, as Yahweh's instruments, to the lives of their children.'¹⁰¹

Peace / Shalom

Shalom is not so much a value as the consequence of having the values we have discussed in place. Nevertheless, as a goal for divine–human, societal and interpersonal relationships, it is highly prized. 'Shalom is the *enjoyment* of right relationships with God, others and nature.'¹⁰² Justice and righteousness are therefore necessary for shalom to exist. It includes a sense of physical and material wellbeing as well. Although ultimately the gift of God,¹⁰³ Israel was commanded to work towards peace and pursue it.¹⁰⁴ It was to be established in individual, family, community and national relationships. Isaiah looked forward to one who would be called the Prince of Peace and whose benevolent rule would increase this peace unceasingly.¹⁰⁵

Israel was to be established in individual, family, community and national relationships

For shalom to be achieved in a world of fractured relationships, reconciliation based on forgiveness is necessary. Enjoyment of the relationship also requires that people are committed to each other in love, for otherwise true shalom-type enjoyment is not possible.

93 Num. 14:18; Joel 2:13

94 e.g. Prov. 14:29; 15:18; 16:32

95 Hoad, J. W. L. 'Patience' in Wood, D. R. W. & I. H. Marshall (eds.) *New Bible Dictionary* (electronic ed. of 3rd ed.) (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press: 1996) p873.

96 Wenham, *The Gap Between Law and Ethics*, p26.

97 Durham, J. I. *Exodus – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Ed.) (Dallas: Word, Incorporated: 2002) p291.

98 Mal. 1:6

99 Prov. 3:9

100 Prov. 14:31

101 Durham, *Exodus*, p291.

102 Ashcroft, *The Relational Dynamic*, p110.

103 Lev. 26:6; Isa. 26:12

104 Ps. 34:14

105 Isa. 9:6

Implications for our study

The preceding discussion shows how wide-ranging and gloriously multiplex the Old Testament vision for interpersonal (and corporate) relationships is. Jesus fulfilled these laws¹⁰⁶ and so not only does an understanding of them help us understand his value system, we will also see them perfectly lived out in his life, perhaps in surprising ways. We will be alert to this fulfilment as we study his relationships, sometimes through a discussion of the values fulfilled, but also by use of brief highlighting of the occurrence of particular values using **bold** text.

Limitations of the Biblical material

In studying relationships we can quickly become entangled in questions of personality and the psychological impact or effect of a particular encounter. However, we need to be aware of the limitations of the kind of literature that we are dealing with when addressing these kinds of question. The Canonical gospels will form our primary source material. Their precise literary genre has been a subject of great debate, but it is generally accepted that, whatever connections may be made with other first-century Greek or Hebrew literature, they are unique in their approach. However, their purpose centres on presenting Jesus in order that people (whether Christians or not) might put their faith in him and understand who he is. They are not writing a biography in the modern sense and their tools are not those of the modern biographer.

Burnett comments 'it does seem clear that the modern understanding that a character is to be understood *primarily* through his or her psychological development is not part of ancient characterisation,'¹⁰⁷ instead, 'one's character (*ethos*) is revealed through one's actions (*praxis*). This indirect method of characterization seems to be the main method of the ancient world, and the gospels are certainly not an exception.'¹⁰⁸

Stanton comments 'The gospel traditions employ techniques of character portrayal which seem almost naïve to the modern reader and which can be and have

been overlooked by scholarly eyes. A very simple and brief account of a person's relationships with others can reveal a good deal about the person concerned; the synoptic traditions need not be eliminated on account of their brevity. As long as such accounts referring to the same person cohere with one another, a few words can reveal a good deal about the character of the person concerned.'¹⁰⁹

It is striking, given our current interest, that this comment focuses on the record of someone's relationships being particularly revealing of their character. If we are to learn all we can about Jesus, we must understand his relationships. In fact, we must learn to study Jesus in the context of his relationships, rather than Jesus in isolation, if we are to truly understand what the gospels seek to tell us about him. We will need to tune ourselves to hear the insights into his character that the gospels offer us without going beyond what the text allows.

Questions to be asked

In the light of the models of relationships and the hermeneutical considerations we will need to consider some or all of the following questions for each incident that we study:

1. Who is Jesus relating to?
2. What is the purpose of the relationship(s) involved?
3. What is the web of relationships surrounding the specific relationship(s) being studied?
4. Can we see any of the five dimensions of relational proximity operating?
5. Are Jesus' actions what we might expect in his time and culture or not?
6. What biblical (Old Testament) relational values are operating?

In addition some other relational questions suggest themselves:

7. Does Jesus' teaching shed light on the way he is conducting the relationship in question?
8. What is Jesus trying to communicate in that incident and in the relationship as a whole?

106 Matt. 5:17

107 Burnett F. W. 'Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels' in *Semeia* 63 (1993) 3–28 p11.

108 Burnett, *Characterization*, p11.

109 Stanton G. N, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, (Cambridge University Press, 1974) p168.

5. The context of Jesus' relationships

The web of relationships surrounding Jesus

The importance of considering webs of relationships has been established above. In the gospels we tend to see Jesus in conversation with just a few people and can miss out on the complex nature of the web of relationships surrounding him. These are most easily understood visually and are set out in simplified form below:

Even a quick examination of the diagram underlines the diverse and variable nature of Jesus' relationships. How Jesus prioritised and navigated his way through this maze of potentially conflicting relational priorities will be an issue that is touched upon in our studies.

Moreover, the closeness of the relationships that Jesus had with these people varied considerably. Some were, overall, moving into a more intimate relationship with him, while others were not. Figure 3 provides a

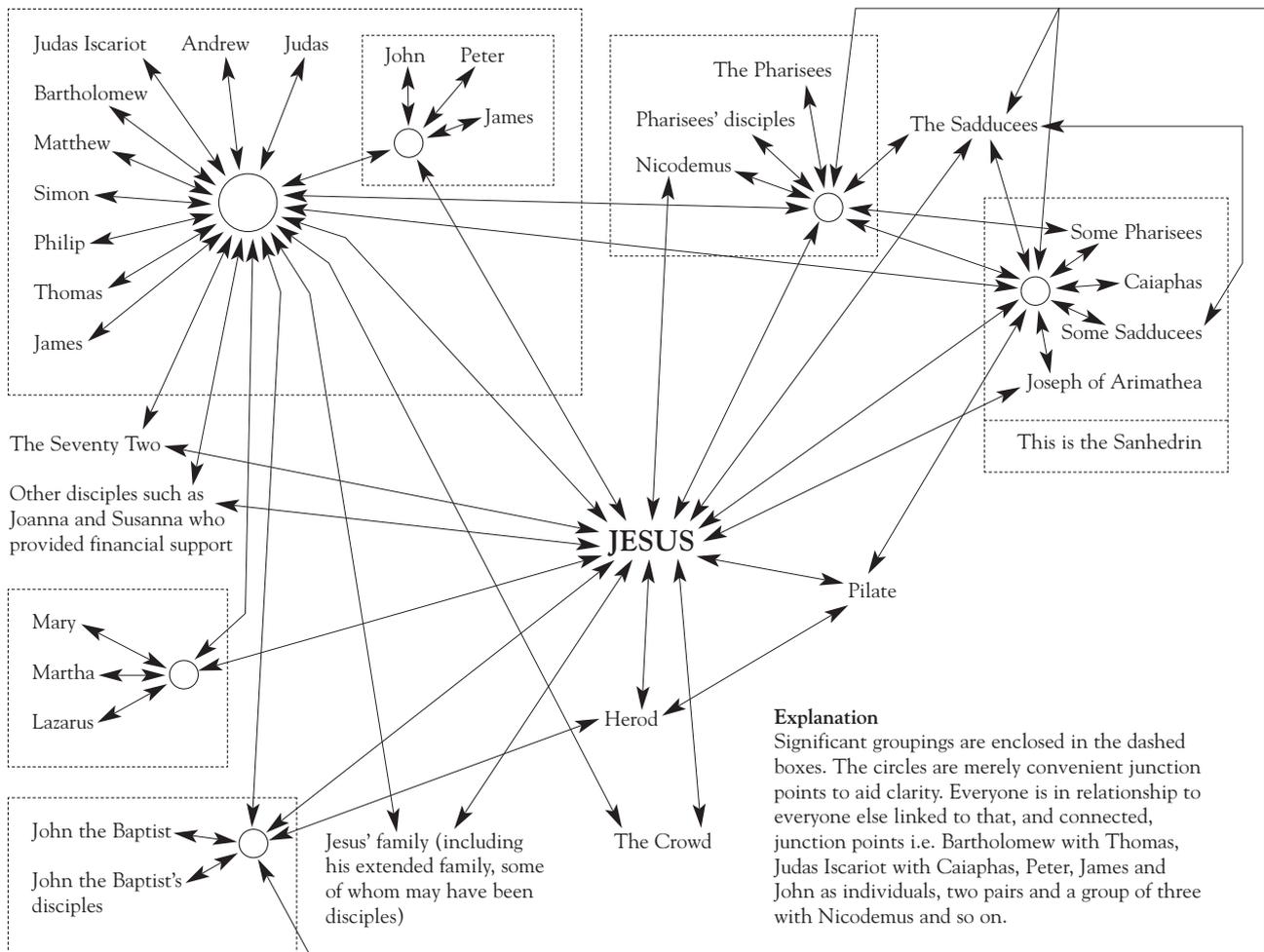


Figure 2: A simplified map of the web of relationships surrounding Jesus

snapshot showing the overall direction of travel of some of the relationships:

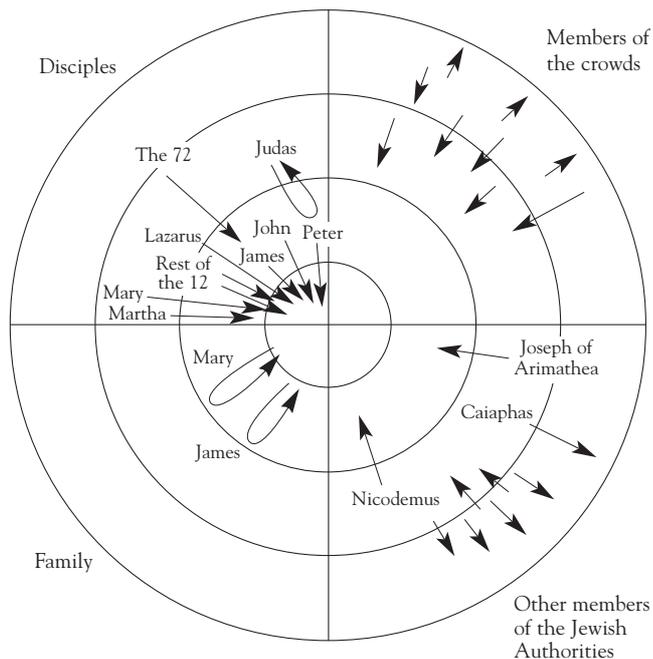


Figure 3: Map of some of Jesus' relationships

Explanation

1. Picture Jesus at the centre of the diagram.
2. The closer the head of the arrow to the centre, the closer the relationship with Jesus.
3. Relationships are never static and people are either growing closer or further apart. The direction of the arrow shows the overall progression of the relationships represented.

Jesus and his relationship with his Heavenly Father

Although Jesus' relationships with humans are the principal focus of this paper, it is impossible to understand Jesus' actions without having some understanding of his relationship with his heavenly Father (from now on, Father).

Jesus' own statements about his relationship with his Father demonstrate its primacy in his life and ministry:

'By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.'¹¹⁰

'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.'¹¹¹

'By myself I can do nothing...' is a remarkable statement; it is only in relationship to the Father (and by implication the Holy Spirit) that Jesus acts or is able to act. In order to act, Jesus looks to the Father; in order to demonstrate his love for his Son, the Father shows him what he is doing. 'It is an image of the perpetual communion of the Son with the Father in his day-by-day life.'¹¹² Jesus' relationship with his Father is such that he can say 'I and the Father are one [in action].'¹¹³ This is a statement of perfect unity of purpose (commonality, in terms of the Relational Proximity Model introduced in Chapter 3.) He also describes a relationship of perfect openness of communication (directness) when he says that 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me.'¹¹⁴

The reality of this relationship is highlighted in the gospels, especially Luke's gospel, where we regularly see Jesus praying.¹¹⁵ These repeated acts of prayer demonstrate Jesus' **holiness** in his unswerving commitment to his Father, his **faithfulness** as he diligently seeks his Father and asks, in faith, for his provision, his **humility** as he depends upon his Father and his **righteousness** in his prioritisation of this relationship and his right conduct of it. He also clearly studied and reflected upon the Hebrew Scriptures so that they informed his understanding of the Father and his mission.¹¹⁶ We will need to be sensitive to this vertical dimension in all of Jesus' other interactions.

To obey his Father was the most fundamental impulse in Jesus' life, the thing that sustained him.¹¹⁷ He described his 'mission' from the Father in various ways, including bringing life in all its fullness to those who will accept it¹¹⁸ and establishing the Kingdom of God. He is also clear that his mission requires him to die and his death and resurrection dominate the gospel accounts. We need to be alert to these constants in our study.

110 John 5:30

111 John 5:19–20

112 Beasley-Murray, G. R. *John – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas: Word, Incorporated: 2002) p76.

113 10:30 – the Greek here requires [in action] and does not mean in person. Beasley-Murray, G. R. *John – Word Biblical Commentary* (electronic ed) (Dallas, Word, Incorporated: 2002) p174 & Carson, *John*, p394.

114 John 14:10

115 Luke 3:21; 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 10:21–22; 11:1; 11:41

116 See, for example, Luke 2:41–52 and Luke 4:14–20. The latter is a particularly good example of this process in Jesus' life. He has clearly reflected sufficiently upon the Scriptures so that, by the power of the Spirit, he is able to declare himself to be the one of whom Isaiah spoke. See also Luke 24:25; 44–49. See further Wright, N. T. *The Challenge of Jesus* (London, SPCK: 2000) p52.

117 John 4:34

118 John 10:10

6. Jesus, Jairus and the woman with haemorrhages¹¹⁹

Having established the method by which we can study Jesus' relationships, we turn first to a fluid and high-pressured situation in which Jesus deals with conflicting relational priorities.

Jairus's urgent request

Mark and Luke record Jesus and his disciples arriving in the town by boat after a hectic period of ministry that has included teaching parables to a large crowd, calming the storm and the exorcism of Legion from the man from the region of Gerasenes. They are immediately confronted by another large crowd.¹²⁰ Although we are not told much about the crowd, they must have come with an expectation that Jesus would 'perform' for them, either by way of teaching or by healing. In such a large crowd, it is reasonable to suppose that there must have been people, in addition to the woman with haemorrhages, who had come hoping to be healed.

However, Jesus is quickly confronted by an urgent and pressing case that claimed priority for two reasons. First, a little girl was so perilously ill as to be dying. Even today, the plight of children has a special power to move people. The majority of the crowd and the disciples would undoubtedly have seen this case as Jesus' priority. Second, Jairus was a prominent member of the town. As ruler of the synagogue he would have held a privileged position. In a hierarchical society, it would have been expected that his case should take priority. Maybe some amongst the crowd or the disciples even thought that it would do Jesus' cause no harm to heal so prominent a person's daughter. The sight of such a person falling at Jesus' feet and 'pleading' gives further stress to the dire condition of the daughter and also speaks of Jairus's love for her.

What Jesus says to Jairus is not recorded, but his response is to go with him, as Jairus requests. Jesus responds to the faith that Jairus displays and prioritises the needs of his little girl over those that may have

existed in the crowd. It was, humanly speaking, an appropriate and understandable prioritisation in the circumstances. The crowd follows in eager anticipation, their emotions clearly stirred, for Luke describes them as nearly crushing Jesus.¹²¹ For the (probably mainly male) crowd to have crushed him, it seems likely that it more or less surrounded Jesus. The members of the crowd were probably emotional because of the plight of the little girl, the identity of her father and the miracle they anticipate, and sought to hurry Jesus to his destination, yet at the same time hindered his progress, hemming him in so that he could hardly move. Progress towards Jairus's house was undoubtedly slow.

This crowd would not have been silent either: did Jairus continue to urge Jesus to come quickly, did he shout at the crowd to give way? Others in the crowd would probably have been shouting encouragement for Jesus to move quickly, possibly others, angry at his departure when they thought they might be healed, might have been shouting for him to pity them. The disciples might have been standing their ground, trying to protect Jesus and rebuking the crowd. In any event, we should not imagine a silent and orderly procession. Jesus, for his part, seems set on going with Jairus but we do not know whether he engaged with Jairus, his disciples or the crowd as he walked.

A surprising interruption

Into the midst of this cacophony and danger the woman with haemorrhages bravely steps. It says much of her faith and desperation that, as a woman who would be considered to defile anyone she touched,¹²² she is prepared to risk pushing through this crowd to touch Jesus' clothes.

When she touches Jesus, he feels the 'power' go out of him. We know, from our earlier study of Jesus' relationship with the Father, that he only does what the Father shows him. On another occasion, Luke talks

¹¹⁹ Mark 5:21–43, Matt. 19:18–26, Luke 8:41–56. The following remarks are heavily indebted to unpublished comments by Michael Schluter.

¹²⁰ Mark 5:21 & 24 stress the size of the crowd.

¹²¹ Luke 8:42

¹²² Lev. 15:19–27

of 'the power of the Lord being present for him (Jesus) to heal the sick'.¹²³ Therefore, it seems likely that Jesus would have interpreted the fact that power had gone out from him in terms of the Father's will and his relationship with the Father and the Spirit. Power has left him because the Father wills it and Jesus, sensitive to this, realises he must stop and discover more. If the Father has willed the healing, then Jesus recognises he must take his part too and so he stops and asks 'Who touched my clothes?'¹²⁴

This was a brave decision. The crowd that had almost crushed him was still surrounding him and probably urging him on to reach this little girl. Jesus himself knows that the little girl is in a perilous condition and that he has the ability to save her. Jairus would still be there, a constant reminder of the urgency and human reality of the situation. To stop, turn around, quell the crowd and speak was not a quick or easy thing to do. In fact, the easy thing would have been to think 'Well, someone's been healed, that's good, but I must save this little girl.' That had been his clear focus and priority, the 'target' he had set for himself.

This focus to obey his Father's direction demonstrate Jesus' holiness and faithfulness

Moreover, the question that Jesus asks exposes him to ridicule, as the disciples' response in Mark's account makes clear. In Luke, it is Peter, as spokesman for the disciples, who is left to point

out the futility of the question. However, Jesus is not, at this point, interested in the crowd and placating them, or in the disciples/Peter and explaining to them what they are missing. His sole focus is upon the person who has touched him, because he believes this to be his Father's will. This focus and wholehearted commitment to obey his Father's direction demonstrate Jesus' **holiness** and **faithfulness**. His continued searching of the crowd and the response that Luke records are an implied rebuke to the lack of trust displayed by Peter and the other disciples. They have not felt it, but Jesus is sure; power has gone out of him and they should trust him.

The only other person in the crowd to know what has happened recognises Jesus' intent. In Luke's words, she recognises that 'she could not go unnoticed'.¹²⁵ So she comes forward, trembling and afraid, to tell Jesus 'the

whole truth'¹²⁶ and 'why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed'.¹²⁷ We can speculate as to why the woman was afraid: maybe out of awe at what had happened, or because of her fear at being discovered to have touched a Rabbi and defiled him, or because of her exposure before a crowd hostile to the delay caused to Jesus reaching the little girl. Maybe she fears the reversal of the healing or feels uncomfortable being the focus of attention when a male community leader is seeking Jesus' attention. Most likely, it is a combination of some or all of these.

Either way, this trembling fearful woman, in a high state of emotion because her years of suffering now appear to be over, would not be likely to tell her story in the succinct manner of the gospel accounts, especially considering the way of life and communication in this part of the world. If she recounted even part of the twelve years of suffering, the many consultations with doctors, the loss of all her money and the deterioration of her condition it would have taken many minutes. All the while, Jairus's little girl's condition would have been becoming more critical and Jairus more frantic.

Yet Jesus takes the time to hear this lady's tale. She is as important to him and as loved by him as any other person. Furthermore, he knows he must do his Father's will. When he speaks to her at the end he uses significant words. 'Daughter' is both affectionate and a recognition of her being a member of Israel – it marks her re-integration into the community after her years of exclusion. It also marks a particular relationship between them, where he affirms her as being his and places himself in the position of 'Father'. He creates a lasting bond between them, when she had thought herself worthy of merely touching the hem of his robe. Where others might condemn her actions as brazen, he affirms and recognises her courage in coming to touch him with the words 'Your faith has healed you.'

Whilst 'go in peace' was a standard farewell, its significance on Jesus' lips is transformed. 'Going in peace means to go as one restored to a proper relationship with God.'¹²⁸ The restoration of this relationship was the key reason that Jesus takes the time to talk to her. The imperative 'be freed from your suffering' also appears to point in this direction. Her physical healing has been completed, as the gospel accounts make clear, so that Jesus is here affirming her

123 Luke 5:17

124 Mark 5:30 (or 'Who touched me?' Luke 8:45)

125 8:47

126 Mark 5:34

127 Luke 8:47

128 Guelich, R. A. *Mark 1–8:26 – Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, Word, Incorporated: 2002) p299.

place in the community and her release from the stigma and worry of the past twelve years. This statement also gives us a sense of the time taken for this encounter. It is hard to imagine Jesus telling her to 'Go in peace' when she was still fearful and trembling, and such emotions as she had were unlikely to have been quickly tamed.

An assessment using the relational proximity model

Although this was a relatively brief encounter, even more briefly related, Jesus establishes each of the dimensions of relational proximity as far as possible in the circumstances. He recognised this woman's need to go beyond mere physical healing and have the opportunity to express all that had happened to her. He gave her the time (continuity) that she needed to do this, even though time was apparently in short supply. By giving this time he communicated to her her value to him and restored her dignity. By seeking further understanding of her background and previous suffering he promoted multiplexity between them and also parity. His affirmation of her faith was also a step towards parity. Yes, Jesus had healed her and could 'call the shots' in the relationship, but her faith was important. Commonality between them is also touched upon here – in the beginning the woman had imposed herself upon Jesus, but Jesus is actually willing to meet her needs. They share a common desire for her healing and her restoration to the community. Jesus also wishes to affirm and encourage her faith. Their communication is face to face and Jesus' response to what he is told and his kind words, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace',¹²⁹ demonstrate his having fully listened to all that the woman said and his emotional engagement with her. This is directness.

Lessons to be learned

What should be learned from this encounter? Jesus' commitment to doing his Father's will stands out. So, too, his **righteousness, compassion, mercy, hsd, patience, generosity** and **love** towards the woman. It is also a sharp lesson about how to shape priorities. Everything about the mission to save Jairus's daughter was worthwhile, and seemed like the obvious priority. Yet Jesus ignores the status of Jairus and the fact that his patient is a little girl in peril of death, and the crowd, to give his single-minded attention to a marginalised woman. In the time that he spent with her, Jesus' relationship with this woman epitomised his command to love one's neighbour as oneself.

The nature of Jesus' **holiness** and its impact on his relationships is stark here. Just as the presence of YHWH made Israel holy, so the presence of Jesus in this woman's life removes her defilement. Whereas anyone touched by her would normally have been considered defiled under the law,¹³⁰ Jesus touches her and removes the impurity; his is a contagious holiness that is mediated through being in relationship with him.

Jesus' declaration that her healing is complete and her suffering over demonstrates his awareness of the web of relationships surrounding this woman. She needed to be restored back into her place in the community; as a Rabbi with authority he is able to do this. His specific commendation of her faith and its role in her healing also indicates his intention and desire to promote her relationship with him and his Father.

Jesus effectively sets a test by which we can measure our own responses to God-inspired interruptions in our lives. The test is whether we stop what we are doing to listen, to pay attention, to pay *full* attention, to the person who has interrupted us and disturbed our prearranged plans and goals. Are our plans more important than the person who has interrupted us? Are we even sensitive to such God-inspired interruptions in the first place? Do we think just of our own concerns, or can we, at a moment's notice, put those to the back of our minds and focus on someone else's agenda. Here is a real challenge to us as to how we handle relationships when there are sudden changes to what we had planned.

Delay leads to death

However, the story is not over. In the moment that Jesus finally finishes his conversation with this woman, friends of Jairus appear with the worst possible news of his daughter's death. They now perceive the situation to be hopeless and tell him not to 'bother' Jesus any more.

Jesus does not challenge or engage with the messengers. In this moment of shock, grief and disappointment, Jairus is Jesus' first concern. His words to him convey both comfort and challenge, 'don't be afraid, just believe.' The comfort and the challenge are firmly rooted in Jesus' identity. He is the one that Jairus has sought out to heal his daughter and the one whom Jairus has just seen heal and comfort the woman with haemorrhages. These events qualify him to comfort with the words 'don't be afraid' and to challenge

129 Luke 8:48

130 Lev. 15:19–27

continuing faith for a greater miracle with the command 'just believe'. We are not told what Jairus is feeling at this moment, but it would not be surprising if, in addition to his grief, he were feeling a sense of frustration at Jesus' failure to respond quickly to the urgency of his request or even annoyance at Jesus being sidetracked by the woman. However, Jesus' words demonstrate his concern for the things that Jairus is experiencing and seek to draw him into deeper commitment to Jesus as well. Jairus needs to keep his focus and faith on Jesus and trust him. Jesus' **h̄sd**, **love** and **compassion** for Jairus are clear, both in his words of comfort and in his challenge to greater faith.

Now Jesus takes control. The crowd and most of the disciples are excluded and have to remain, while Jesus, Jairus, Peter, James and John proceed to the house. Some time has elapsed, for the (probably professional) mourners are in full voice when they reach it.¹³¹ Jesus' words to them are probably aimed at encouraging Jairus, as much as enlightening the mourners as to what is about to happen. He is not denying the reality of the little girl's death, but viewed from the perspective of the miracle he is about to accomplish, her state is best likened to sleep. The barrier of death is too much for them to see past and they ridicule him.

Jesus is not distracted by their ridicule (a mark of his **humility** before the crowd and his **loyalty/h̄sd** to Jairus), but instead removes them from the house. The relational dynamic of this action is worth considering. The doubt of the mourners seems to be part of the reason for their exclusion, but more than that, it is likely that Jesus recognises the need for the family to have privacy in the aftermath of the miracle he is about to perform. If he does recognise this, the inclusion of Peter, James and John is surprising, for the addition of three (physically strong, given their professions) men in the room would not have added to the family's privacy! This demonstrates something of Jesus' commitment to the training of his inner circle and the nature of his relationship with them.

Once they are alone Jesus takes the little girl's hand in an intimate way and then addresses her, telling her to get up and enabling her to do so. His **compassionate** concern for her is demonstrated in the command to give her food. This ratifies the miracle – she is flesh and blood, needing food, and puts normality back into the relationship between the girl and her parents; he has restored her to life and *into relationship with her family*, not so that she can be a 'miracle girl' defined solely by this experience.

A further assessment using the relational proximity model

Again we see Jesus acting in a way that is helpfully explored by using some of the dimensions of this model. The potential for directness of communication with Jairus is enhanced by Jesus' exclusion of the crowd. Multiplexity is promoted through Jesus' challenge to Jairus to 'just believe' as it revealed more of who Jesus was to be to Jairus. Jesus' step to include Jairus's wife also developed multiplexity in the relationship, as well as recognising the reality of the web of relationships surrounding Jairus and his daughter. Jesus and Jairus share a common purpose in their desire for the little girl to be restored, but Jesus has a further aim which he seeks to draw Jairus into – increasing and affirming Jairus's faith in him. Whilst the parents must have felt powerless in the face of their daughter's death and then awestruck at Jesus' actions, Jesus' command to them to feed their daughter would have begun to alleviate these feelings and establish parity – they could do something for her and fulfil a role that he did not.

Further lessons

What further lessons should be drawn? In the same way that Jesus was attentive to the needs of the woman with haemorrhages, he also took care of Jairus when the time came. His failure to come quickly to Jairus's aid was not a mark of Jesus' disdain for him, or his daughter, but the consequence of Jesus following the Father's direction. Once he had completed healing the woman with haemorrhages, he gave Jairus his full attention, just as he did to the woman. His words to Jairus reflected his empathy and **compassion** with what Jairus was feeling. Jairus received his desired outcome as his little girl was healed. He was also privileged to see a greater miracle, which was an act of **mercy** and **love**, although at the time it would not have felt like that! Ultimately, Jairus's nascent faith in Jesus was given greater grounds for future belief, and his observation of Jesus' **faithful** responses to his Father's guidance would have taught Jairus a great deal about the nature of that faith and its expression in **holy** obedience.

There is no sense that Jesus ever felt that the situation was 'getting out of control' despite the way that it unfolded. His faith and commitment to the Father must have been instrumental in this. Jesus was confident both in his Father and his own identity, and so content to give each encounter the time and thought it needed.

131 However, they could have been gathered in anticipation of the death.

7. Jesus and Peter

Why study Jesus' relationship with Peter?

Studying Jesus' relationship with Peter allows us to consider a very different kind of relationship to those we have just studied. Jesus chose Peter to be his disciple and, as will be seen, committed extensive time to their relationship intending to achieve particular purposes.

Furthermore, Peter receives more attention from the gospel writers than any of the other twelve apostles. He appears to have been a spokesman for the disciples and to have vocalised what was on all of their minds at certain points. For instance in Mark 7:17 all the disciples ask Jesus to explain a parable to them; in the parallel narrative in Matthew 15:15, it is on Peter's lips that the question is found.¹³²

Peter's character also makes him particularly noticeable. Any reader of the gospels will be familiar with bold, enthusiastic Peter, who takes Jesus to one side to tell him that he had misunderstood his mission,¹³³ who jumps from a boat to be with Jesus – once walking on water,¹³⁴ another time wading to the shore;¹³⁵ it was Peter who recklessly told Jesus that he would never abandon him, even if others did so.¹³⁶

Most noticeably, Jesus singles Peter out for a peculiar honour when he renames him and tells him he will be the foundation on which the Church¹³⁷ will be built and that he holds the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.¹³⁸

Early encounters

Before the gospel accounts begin

Peter and Jesus probably knew each other before the first encounter recorded in the gospels that we find in John Chapter 1. Although Peter had been born in Bethsaida,¹³⁹ he later moved to Capernaum, where Jesus and his brothers also lived, although we do not know when Peter moved. We do know that he and his brother Andrew were business partners with James and John in a fishing business on Lake Galilee.¹⁴⁰ Both Wenham and Brownrigg consider it likely that their business would have involved the sale of fish to Jerusalem, and even that John's family, which was probably a priestly family, supplied the High Priest's household, which would explain John's welcome into the courtyard on the night of the Jesus' trial.¹⁴¹ Moreover, they argue that James and John were cousins of Jesus.¹⁴² A close study of the various accounts of the crucifixion indicates that Mary, Jesus' mother, was the sister of Salome, who was the mother of James and John. Moreover, as we will see, Andrew, Peter's brother was a disciple of Jesus' second cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus' ministry took place in the midst of a complex and diverse network of relationships that included extended family relationships that make it likely that Peter and Jesus had met each other before the encounters recorded in the gospel.

132 See Cullmann, O. *Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr: A Historical and Theological Study*. Trans. by Floyd V. Filson. (London: SCM Press: 1953) p24 for this and other examples.

133 Mark 8:32

134 Matt. 14:29

135 John 21:7

136 Mark 14:29, Matt. 26:33

137 Despite some stretched interpretations by some commentators that seek to demonstrate that the rock of which Jesus speaks in Matt. 16:18 is Peter's declaration of who Jesus is, the clear consensus and obvious reading is that Peter himself is the rock. Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 14–28 Vol. 33B: Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas, Word: 2002) p470.

138 Matt. 16:19

139 John 1:44

140 Luke 5:7–10

141 John 18:15ff

142 See Brownrigg, R. *The Twelve Apostles*, (New York, MacMillan: 1974) p85–89. Wenham, J. *Easter Enigma*, (Exeter, Paternoster Press: 1992) (2nd Edition) p39–42; 132–139. Although this view is not accepted by all scholars, it does have credibility, see Beasley-Murray, G. R. *John – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas, Word, Incorporated: 2002) p348 for a discussion of some of the difficulties with this view.

In the Gospels

Although Jesus and Peter may have met before, it is only the encounters recorded in the gospels that we have available to study; whilst we can legitimately hypothesise their having known each other, the extent of their relationship is impossible to surmise.

Their earliest face-to-face encounter recorded in the gospels is in John¹⁴³ and appears to have taken place near Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan, where John the Baptist ministered. The exact location of this place is subject to debate,¹⁴⁴ but it is safe to say that it is a place significantly to the south of the Sea of Galilee where Peter made his living as a fisherman. We are not told why Peter was in the region, but given that his brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist,¹⁴⁵ it would not be surprising if his visit was connected to John's presence.¹⁴⁶

It was Andrew, Peter's brother, who first took him to Jesus. The description of their meeting is brief; Jesus looked at Peter and said 'You are Peter son of John. You will be called Cephas.'¹⁴⁷ This renaming of Simon by Jesus was highly significant in their relationship and is considered further below.

At some point after this encounter, Peter and Andrew return to their occupations as fishermen in Capernaum¹⁴⁸ and the synoptic gospels record Jesus seeking them out (again) and calling them to leave their old way of life as fishermen and become fishers of men.¹⁴⁹ After this Peter is seen at the heart of Jesus' group of disciples and his role as leader and spokesperson develops.

Jesus' life-changing impact upon Simon

The transformation of Simon, a Galilean fisherman, to Peter, leader of a religious movement prepared to challenge and defy the Jewish¹⁵⁰ and Roman authorities,¹⁵¹ is a story of enduring power and has

provided hope and inspiration for Christians throughout the ages. Key moments in the relationship that caused this transformation will be discussed, but space does not permit a comprehensive account of all that Jesus did and said in Peter's presence, all of which contributed in some way to this transformation.

The purpose of the relationship

As noted above,¹⁵² all relationships have one or more significant purposes and we will identify those that Jesus establishes in his relationship with Peter.

A call to Jesus

Mark¹⁵³ and Matthew's¹⁵⁴ description of the call of Peter and Andrew is also brief. Jesus sees them, calls them and they obey. The gospel writers clearly intend to portray Jesus' authority as the one who calls and the appropriate response to this call. For our purposes it is the content of the call that is important; it is first and foremost a call to follow Jesus, to be in relationship with him. This is the foundation of all the other aspects of the relationship that we will explore – the relationship between Jesus and Peter is one in which Peter is called to follow Jesus. In fact it is so important that Jesus' last words to Peter, recorded this time in John's gospel, are also 'Follow me.'¹⁵⁵

In Mark and Matthew, the various Greek words translated 'follow' in these passages are those used to describe the action of following after a Rabbi by his disciples. They were supposed to imitate his example as well as absorb his teaching.¹⁵⁶ There is also a marked difference in the calling as well, for usually a disciple chose a Rabbi to follow and the training was to enable the disciple to become a teacher of the Law.¹⁵⁷ Here the call is to be a fisher of men.

This historical insight highlights the unusual fact that Jesus is the one who initiates the relationship and the unusual role to which Simon and Andrew are called. It

143 John 1:40-42

144 See Carson, *John*, p146.

145 John 1:35

146 Cullmann, *Peter*, p23.

147 John 1:42

148 Possibly while Jesus is tempted in the wilderness.

149 Mark 1:14ff, Matt. 4:18ff & Luke 5:10. (Luke adds Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law before his being called, 4:38).

150 Acts 4:19; 5:29

151 Church tradition holds that Peter was crucified upside down under Nero's persecution.

152 See 'The Purposes of Relationships,' Chapter 3.

153 Mark 1:16

154 Matt. 4:18

155 John 21:22, although the Greek verb used is a different one, the idea that the basic requirement of their relationship is that Peter should follow Jesus is confirmed.

156 Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 1-13 – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas: Word, Incorporated: 2002) p76.

157 Guelich, R. A. *Mark 1-8:26 – Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas: Word, Incorporated: 2002) p51.

hints both at Jesus' commitment to the relationship and his commitment to training the brothers to a particular task. From Luke we learn that his choice of the Twelve takes place after a night of prayer,¹⁵⁸ highlighting the importance of this choice in the context of Jesus' ministry and his relationship with his Father. Note that Jesus calls them to be in relationship with him in order that they might in turn call others to that same relationship.

We should not miss that Jesus' action in calling Simon to follow him is also one of **love** and **h̄sd**. Peter himself recognises his unworthiness in Luke 5:8 when he confesses his sinfulness to Jesus – the only disciple recorded to do so.

A fisher of men

Jesus prophetically calls Peter to a new way of life and living as a fisher of men. The difference between his old occupation and what he would eventually become and do is belied by the use of 'fisher' in both job titles and is, perhaps, something of a pun. It is significant that Jesus tells Peter of his new role so early in their master–disciple relationship. He wants Peter to be clear about the nature of their relationship and the goal towards which they are aiming. This slightly cryptic phrase would have demonstrated to Peter that he was not being called to be a disciple in the usual model and began to prepare him for the training that would lie ahead. This **truthfulness** was essential for Jesus' relationship with Peter to flourish. It is also mark of Jesus' **just** and **righteous** behaviour, for it would have been wrong to call Peter to be a disciple without making clear, at least to some degree, what this would involve.

Jesus' calling of Peter to a particular task and role in the context of their relationship is not a self-serving act by Jesus. First, as we will see below, Jesus has a genuine love and concern for Peter; secondly, he will make it possible for Peter to fulfil the role to which he is calling him; thirdly, as the Son of God he has authority to require this from Peter; and fourthly the

'benefits' to Peter are huge. Peter himself recognized that Jesus held 'the words of life' even before he had full understanding of Jesus' identity.¹⁵⁹

As noted above,¹⁶⁰ the fact that all relationships have a primary purpose does not mean they are merely a means to an end, for the goal of the relationship can be the sustaining of the relationship itself, but what is required to sustain it still needs to be made clear. Here Jesus seeks a relationship with Peter, but its particular shape is inevitably defined by the fact that Jesus is the Master, Peter the disciple and, as Peter will come to realise, Jesus is the incarnate Son of God and Peter a created human being.

The renaming of Simon

Whilst some scholars believe that the exact moment at which Jesus renamed Simon is lost in the oral traditions behind the gospels¹⁶¹ (so that the gospel writers simply choose an appropriate moment within their narratives to relate it), others believe that it is possible to harmonise the accounts.¹⁶² Although the harmonisation seems preferable,¹⁶³ on either view the renaming was a significant event attested by each of the gospel writers and credited specifically to the actions of Jesus.

It was not uncommon for Rabbis to rename their disciples,¹⁶⁴ and Jesus also renamed James and John as the 'Sons of Thunder'.¹⁶⁵ They, with Peter, made up an inner circle among the twelve disciples. However, Peter's renaming assumes far greater significance in the New Testament writings than that of James and John, for he becomes known by his new name.

Cullmann helpfully comments that in order to appreciate the impact that the renaming would have had on Simon and the other disciples we should refer to him as Simon Rock not Simon Peter, which is too familiar for us.¹⁶⁶ Keener suggests his name 'is roughly the English "Rocky,"'¹⁶⁷ but the Aramaic which most commentators agree underlies the Greek gospel account is a noun and not an adjective. Fitzmyer's

158 Luke 6:12

159 John 6:68

160 See 'The Purposes of Relationships'.

161 Cullmann, *Peter*, p21.

162 Cullmann, *Peter*, p21. See also Carson, *John*, p146.

163 In a harmonisation John records the moment in which Jesus uses the future tense and states 'you will be called...' This can be taken to mean either that the renaming will take place at a future point, or that this is the name Simon is to bear from that point on. Matthew's account (Matt. 16:18) is then either the moment of the renaming, in fulfilment of the prophecy recorded by John, or an affirmation and even explanation of the earlier renaming following Peter's significant confession. Mark and Luke merely record the fact of the renaming in their list of the Twelve, not the event itself (Mark 3:16, Luke 6:14).

164 Cullmann, *Peter*, p20.

165 Mark 3:17

166 Cullmann, *Peter*, p20.

167 Keener, C. S. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge, Eerdmans: 1999) p426.

attempt to demonstrate that the name was in use in this period, albeit not a common one, is not entirely convincing.¹⁶⁸ Even if the name was in use, it hardly diminishes the effect of the renaming on Simon, for a name is something that is a key part of our identity.

Most importantly, the renaming of Peter was predictive and prophetic. For, whenever the renaming took place, Simon was not the rock of his new name, but needed to be shaped and trained into that character and role by Jesus. A key purpose, therefore, for Jesus in his relationship with Peter is to accomplish this training so that Peter becomes the rock.

Key moments in Jesus and Peter's relationship

Given that Jesus gives Peter a unique role, we might also expect to see him giving particular attention to Peter and his development as a disciple and there are hints of this in the gospel accounts. We have already

Peter, James and John are given the privilege of seeing the raising of the Synagogue Ruler's daughter

noted that Peter is one of the 'inner circle' with James and John. They are singled out to spend extra time with Jesus and are given the privilege of seeing the raising of the Synagogue Ruler's daughter from the dead,¹⁶⁹ witnessing the Transfiguration,¹⁷⁰ and keeping watch with Jesus in Gethsemane.¹⁷¹ They receive teaching along with Andrew

about the end of the age.¹⁷² Peter also has a one-to-one question-and-answer session with Jesus about the Temple Tax¹⁷³ and has the privilege, apparently unique among the disciples, of hosting Jesus.¹⁷⁴

Peter as Jesus' host

The host-guest relationship 'carried strong connotations in Palestine and throughout the

Mediterranean world. In addition to implying mutual acceptance between host and guest, it tended to put the host in a position of honour and the guest in a position of obligation. In presenting Peter as Jesus' host, a first-century story-teller would likely have been sensitive to such implications.¹⁷⁵ This may well explain why it is that Peter feels free to lead others to interrupt Jesus' solitary prayer in Mark 1:36,¹⁷⁶ although his headstrong character and tendency to 'act first, think later' may also have a role in explaining his actions.

This latter incident is the first of what becomes a regular pattern in Jesus' relationship with Peter, where Peter fails to understand what Jesus is doing and Jesus has to correct him. Here, it is early in their relationship and Peter is, perhaps understandably, so thrilled by the previous evening's healings and by the crowd's desire to see more of Jesus that he wants Jesus to come to them immediately. Jesus' correction here is gentle and achieved by simply teaching Peter about the need for his ministry to spread more widely.¹⁷⁷ This is the first of many incidents in his relationship with Peter where Jesus displays **patience**.

*Paying Temple Tax*¹⁷⁸

There is a striking intimacy about the exchange that precedes an unusual miracle for the benefit of Jesus and Peter which enables them to pay their Temple Tax. Jesus' use of a question rather than direct teaching, his association of himself and Peter ('so that *we* may not offend them') and his paying of Peter's tax all point to a closeness of relationship demonstrated by a willing identification with Peter. It is likely that Peter's answer to the initial enquiry by the tax collectors was an assumption, rather than based on actual knowledge,¹⁷⁹ but Jesus corrects his assumption gently through the exchange, rather than by flat contradiction. He also teaches Peter the importance of not causing unnecessary offence to the Jewish authorities (**honouring others**).¹⁸⁰

168 Fitzmyer J. A. 'Aramaic *Kepha*' and Peter's Name in the New Testament', in *To Advance the Gospel*. (New York, Crossroad: 1981) pp112–24.

169 Mark 5:37

170 Mark 9:2

171 Mark 14:33

172 Mark 13:3

173 Matt. 17:24

174 Mark 1:29

175 Wiarda, T. *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament WUNT 2. Reihe*, Bd. 2/127. (Tübingen, Mohr: 2000) p125

176 Notice that Jesus has been up late the night before healing and has just completed a 'heavy' period of ministry. Nevertheless he gets up early to spend time in prayer, perhaps not our most likely response. Peter would have seen this and learnt the importance of prayer and seeking God for his ministry. Is this why we find him praying on the roof at noon (not a usual hour for prayer) in Acts 10:9, when he receives his vision about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church?

177 Mark 1:38

178 Matt. 17:24

179 Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 14–28 Vol. 33B: Word Biblical Commentary* (Electronic Edition) (Dallas, Word: 2002) p511.

180 Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, p511

Jesus' choice of a fish as the means to provide the coin to pay the tax is also relationally shrewd. Peter would have caught many hundreds, if not thousands of fish in his life and would know how unlikely it would be to find a coin in the mouth of any, let alone the first fish that he catches. Moreover, the time taken to get his line ready, cast it into the lake and catch the fish (which did not necessarily bite instantly!) gave him plenty of time to reflect upon the lesson he was being taught. There is also a strong element of humour in the requirement.

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ

Luke has a theme of showing Jesus in prayer at key points, i.e. when he receives the Holy Spirit and hears the Father's voice from heaven at his baptism,¹⁸¹ before choosing the Twelve¹⁸² and at the Transfiguration.¹⁸³ This motif shows not only Jesus' reliance upon his Father, but perhaps also the efficacy of his prayers. The descent of the Holy Spirit accompanied by the Father's voice, the knowledge of who to choose as apostles and the Transfiguration are each, because of their close juxtaposition to a description of Jesus praying, probably meant to be seen as the answers to those prayers.

Luke introduces Peter's confession by telling us that Jesus was praying and that his disciples were with him.¹⁸⁴ The implication is that Jesus' prayers are answered in some way by Peter's confession. Jesus has prayed to the Father, who has given Peter insight to understand that Jesus is the Messiah.¹⁸⁵ As we will see, Jesus' prayers for Peter are crucial to his maintaining his faith during Jesus' trial and crucifixion and Jesus' prayers to the Father are a key source of blessing for Peter. A core part of Jesus' relationship with Peter is praying for him, pointing to the vertical dimension in all of Jesus' relationships and also highlighting Jesus' holiness, *h̄sd* and love.

The confession that Peter makes, as spokesman for the disciples, is a significant one. As a result, Jesus appoints Peter to a key role in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus reaffirms Peter as the rock because he understands who Jesus is; it is the quality of his relationship with Jesus,

based on the knowledge revealed to him, that makes him suitable to be the rock.

The holder of the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven

The interpretation of Matthew 16:18–19 has been the subject of significant controversy, especially centred on the conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant interpretation of these verses and the primacy or otherwise of the Pope. We will not dwell on these issues here, but rather note that the giving of this role to Peter highlights again Peter's unique role. It is not an accident that it is Peter who delivers the first post-Pentecost sermon,¹⁸⁶ is entrusted with telling the infant Church that Gentiles are to be admitted¹⁸⁷ and is the one apostle to whom Paul presents himself before he begins his ministry in earnest.¹⁸⁸

The statement that Peter will hold the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven is prophetic, for we quickly see that Peter has yet to grasp the true nature of the Kingdom.

Peter rebukes Jesus

Whilst Jesus may have corrected Peter's erroneous thinking gently in the examples we have considered above, when Peter presumes to take Jesus to one side and rebuke him for talking of dying, Jesus' response is sharp and immediate 'Get behind me Satan!'¹⁸⁹ The strength of this response is shocking and might be considered unnecessarily offensive and unloving; how should it be explained?

One possible explanation is that Jesus is himself struggling with this aspect of his vocation (as we see clearly in Gethsemane) and needs to be decisive in resisting the temptation that Peter offers, just as he was when directly tempted by Satan.¹⁹⁰ Here Jesus' holiness and determination to be obedient to his Father requires him to act robustly towards Peter and the temptation he (unwittingly, perhaps) presents. A further explanation, that complements the previous one, is that Jesus knows Peter's need to accept Jesus' words and authority if he is to become the rock and the

181 Luke 2:21

182 Luke 6:12

183 Luke 9:28

184 Luke 9:18

185 Matt. 16:17

186 Acts 2:14

187 Acts 11:1–18

188 Gal. 1:18

189 Mark 8:33, Matt. 16:23

190 Luke 4:1–13

Fisher of Men that he should. Peter unwittingly stands in opposition to the central act of Jesus' vocation from the Father and needs to understand the peril of doing so. Any lesser or gentler rebuke to Peter would have been a disservice to him, underplaying the seriousness of his actions. This rebuke is thus a demonstration of Jesus' **love, justice** and **truthfulness**.

Whilst we are not told why Peter is so opposed to the idea of Jesus dying, it seems likely that he is expecting Jesus to be some kind of political Messiah, and that Jesus' exaltation to the throne of Israel will also mean glory for him, reinforcing the need for Jesus' strong correction. We can also see the extent of the change that takes place in Peter for he eventually submits to Jesus' will and no longer seeks his own glory.¹⁹¹

Peter's strength of character also requires a sustained moulding process. Even as late in the gospel accounts as after the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Peter using violence to oppose Jesus' arrest when he cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant.¹⁹² He is a determined, passionate man, not easily turned from his course. Jesus' assessment of Peter and his tempering of his response according to the seriousness of Peter's error show Jesus' **righteousness, compassion** and **patience**.

Peter walks on water

Peter's strength of character was also an asset and we see Jesus seeking to channel it towards a deeper faith. In this incident, recorded by Matthew,¹⁹³ Peter and the other disciples have spent a busy period of ministry with Jesus. They have tried to take rest together in a solitary space, but the crowds have continued to pursue them.¹⁹⁴ Jesus then involves the disciples in an amazing miracle when he feeds over 5,000 people,¹⁹⁵ before dismissing them to cross the lake in a boat.

The disciples have encountered a storm and have been battling the weather for many hours. When Jesus approaches them it is between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. They must have been physically exhausted, not only from their ministry, but also from their fight with the storm. They possibly feel abandoned by Jesus. However, their principal emotion when they see what they believe to be a ghost approaching is fear. In Peter this emotion is quickly reversed when he sees that it is Jesus. His

instinct is to get to where Jesus is. Whilst we might consider that his behaviour is just another example of typically impulsive Peter, and the request to walk with Jesus on such rough and stormy water an ill-thought-out gesture, Jesus does not condemn but, **generously** and **mercifully**, seeks to encourage his faith.

Peter's question 'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water'¹⁹⁶ assumes that it is Jesus and should be read as a statement of faith, rather than an identity check.¹⁹⁷ Jesus response of 'Come' is entirely consistent with his initial call for Peter to follow him. Peter, inconsistent to this calling at other moments, wants to obey now in this unusual situation. This 'getting-out-of-the-boat' faith that he displays is precisely the kind he will need later on and Jesus' response to Peter's subsequent failure is not to condemn his initial faith, but the inconsistency and double-mindedness that he displays in sustaining it.¹⁹⁸ Jesus wants more of this kind of faith from Peter.

Training for ministry

We also see Jesus encouraging Peter's faith, along with that of the other disciples, through the way in which he provides them with opportunities to practise their future ministry. Luke 9:1 and parallel passages relate Jesus sending out the twelve disciples on a preaching and healing tour, demonstrating both his care for them (it's better for them to try this activity for the first time whilst he is still on earth) and his planning towards the goal of equipping his disciples for the task that he and his Father have for them.

The transfiguration

We do not know whether Jesus was expecting the transfiguration to take place when he took Peter, James and John for a walk up the mountain. Luke indicates that Jesus was praying and it may well be that he was praying for his inner core of disciples and their growing understanding of his identity. Matthew and Mark do not tell us about Jesus' prayer, but describe the fact of the walk, the mountain and the transfiguration.

Either way, we can draw conclusions about this event and the nature of Jesus' relationship with Peter (and James and John). In the first place, he is clearly

191 cf. Acts 5:41

192 John 10:18

193 Matt. 14:22ff

194 Matt. 14:13

195 Matt. 14:19-21

196 Matt. 14:28

197 Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, p424.

198 See Hagner, p424 on the word *δισταζω* (NIV translates it as 'doubt') and double-mindedness.

prioritising time alone with them. The walk up the high mountain would have taken at least a few hours and it is difficult to imagine that Jesus does not use this time to instruct them or deepen their relationship with him in some way. Even if they simply enjoy each others' company, the walk and the conversation would have allowed growth in their relationships together.

The transfiguration itself reveals more of Jesus' identity to the disciples. Whether Jesus expects it to occur or it is an act of the Father's initiative, the intention to demonstrate Jesus' glory and reveal his identity show the importance of a relationship that is based upon a proper understanding of who Jesus is.

Peter's response, although excused by the delirium of sheer terror, does show that he has somehow placed Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the same level; they are all to have the same kind of shelter. The significance of the voice from the cloud is heightened when one considers Peter's recent confession of Jesus as the Christ.¹⁹⁹ Although he made that confession, he quickly tried to tell Jesus how he should behave.²⁰⁰ The voice emphasises Jesus' sonship and the fact that Peter and the other disciples are to *listen to him*. It seems that the transfiguration, whatever else its effect upon Jesus and the blessing it was to him, was necessary in order to get Peter and the other disciples to view Jesus rightly. They may have drawn the right conclusion about his being the Christ, but they did not fully understand what that meant. The transfiguration shows that there is far more to Jesus than they recognise and tells them that the key in their relationship with him is listening to him.

Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial

Whilst all of Jesus' interactions with Peter can be understood as being **loving** and motivated by Peter's best interests, a few insights noted by the gospel writers show us the depth of his concern. Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial is one example of this. At the time it was given, it clearly dispirited and concerned Peter and the other disciples.²⁰¹ In retrospect, however, Peter would have been reassured that although Jesus knew in advance of his betrayal, it did not disqualify him from a relationship with Jesus, or a position as his disciple.

Jesus' **h̄sd**, **faithfulness**, **forgiveness** and **compassion** are all on display here.

Luke's account gives us particular insight. Jesus begins his prediction with the words 'Simon, Simon'²⁰² a repetition of a name that is also used when Jesus addresses Martha²⁰³ after her frustration at Mary's lack of assistance in their house and in lamenting for Jerusalem.²⁰⁴ In and of itself the repetition demonstrates a sense of grief, of **kindness** and of **love**, but Luke uses it to highlight moments of particular emotion that Jesus experiences. Here, Jesus is particularly moved by the trial that he knows Peter will undergo and his use of Simon, rather than Peter, underlines this. All of Simon's progress towards becoming Peter will be knocked back in this one incident.

Although Satan has asked to sift all the disciples (the Greek 'you' is plural), Jesus has prayed for Simon especially that his faith will not fail. Jesus is concerned to guard his relationship with Peter, which, at the moment of his testing and in the future, will be based upon faith. We have already noted Luke's theme of demonstrating the nature and effectiveness of Jesus' prayer life as a major source of blessing to the disciples.²⁰⁵ Luke is clear: Peter will survive the ordeal because Jesus has prayed for him. This highlights Jesus' care and concern (**h̄sd**, **compassion**, **love**) for Peter, the responsibility that he feels and the nature of his relationship with his heavenly Father that he is assured of answered prayer. It displays one of the ways in which his relationship with Peter and his relationship with the Father interact. Jesus has particular concern for Peter in his trial as he will be the only disciple to betray Jesus in such a public fashion. He is also concerned that Peter will come through his ordeal and become the rock he should be. Jesus expects Peter to eventually strengthen the other disciples in and through his relationships with them.²⁰⁶

Gethsemane

Reading Matthew and Mark's accounts of Gethsemane, the primary reason that we can discern for Jesus taking Peter, James and John apart with him, is his need for companionship and support in his hour

199 Mark 8:29

200 Mark 8:32

201 see John 14:1

202 Luke 22:31

203 Luke 10:41

204 Luke 13:34

205 e.g. Luke also connects the disciples' understanding of Jesus' identity in 9:18 with his prayer. John too acknowledges this John 16:6ff.

206 Luke 22:32

of trial – ‘keep watch with me.’²⁰⁷ This is a rare insight of mutuality in Jesus’ relationships with the disciples. We frequently see him teaching and correcting the disciples, preparing them for what lies ahead. They often make demands of him in times of peril or confusion, seeking reassurance from him. Here we see Jesus needing support and hoping that the time that he has spent in building a close relationship with these three will result in that support being offered. That it is not, does not deny the kind of relationship that Jesus has sought with these three disciples. His relationship with them was not purely professional, but genuinely **loving**, allowing vulnerability to be exposed and the possibility of close mutual support and also the possibility of failure.

That Peter is singled out for rebuke for failing to stay awake points to his position as leader, and possibly also the closeness of his relationship with Jesus. If Peter was awake enough and close enough to observe any of Jesus’ prayers, he would also have received precious insight into the possibility of real intimacy with the Heavenly Father, for all of Jesus’ emotions are displayed as he prays. Perhaps this whole incident lies behind Peter’s comments in his Epistle written later in his life:

‘Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ... Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.’²⁰⁸

Jesus restores Peter

Jesus’ concern and love for Peter is also shown in his post-resurrection conversation in John 21. He takes the time aside (although possibly not out of earshot of the other disciples)²⁰⁹ to reinstate Peter and demonstrate his **forgiveness**. Although Peter is hurt by Jesus’ third repetition of his question ‘Do you love me?’, Jesus is gently forcing a threefold declaration of his love that mirrors his threefold denial. Not only this, but possibly also the presence of fire, a time of day that was slightly cold and the presence of the Beloved Disciple²¹⁰ in the background all serve as tangible

reminders of the betrayal scene. It is almost as if Jesus reconstructs it in order to demonstrate to Peter the completeness of his restoration.²¹¹

Furthermore, it requires Peter to declare ‘Lord you know all things...’ and throw himself in reliance back on Jesus. Rather than the previous episodes where Peter has demonstrated a penchant for extravagant claims of loyalty, here he keeps the declaration simple and appeals to Jesus to weigh his words. There has been progress in Peter’s relationship with Jesus as Peter responds in a more appropriate manner than he has on previous occasions.

Jesus’ restoration of Peter demonstrates his **love, faithfulness, hsd, forgiveness, mercy and compassion**. This particular interaction has enduring implications for the Church. Although Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ was a key factor in his being the rock on which Jesus will build his church, Peter’s complete restoration following his failure is also highly significant, for all who join the Church come through this route. Moreover, Peter’s experiencing of this forgiveness would have carried particular resonance for him in the light of the questions he had asked on the subject,²¹² when perhaps he previously felt that the idea of forgiveness should have a limit.

The importance of community

It is significant that almost all of Peter’s training and transformation takes place in relationship to others. An examination of Jesus’ method of discipleship training reveals a strong emphasis on community. A helpful overview of discipleship in Matthew is provided by Clark:²¹³

- ‘Matthew focuses on the learning relationship Jesus had with his twelve disciples, who although specifically chosen, made a voluntary commitment to Jesus and his way of life.
- They entered into a close personal relationship with Jesus who committed himself to them.
- Jesus established a discipling community leading to growth experiences and facilitated learning.
- Formal teaching played a key role in the discipling model, supplemented by other methods of teaching. Jesus structured their lives and activities in such a way that they were constantly challenged to

207 Matt. 26:38

208 1 Pet. 5:7, 9–10

209 John 21:20

210 Probably John.

211 I am grateful to Jonathan Burnside for these insights about Jesus’ reconstruction of aspects of the High Priest’s courtyard.

212 Matt. 18:21

213 Clark, I. *Experiential Learning as a tool for discipleship* (Easneye, All Nations Christian College, Unpublished: 2006) summarising the findings of Collinson, S. *Making Disciples* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster: 2004) p55–56

question and learn from a multiplicity of informal situations.

- Jesus himself was an example to follow.
- A serving community provided opportunities for learning.
- Jesus provided opportunity to reflect and learn from experiences during the busy periods of ministry. They learned new skills and behaviours as Jesus led them into demanding situations which stretched their little faith to the limits. The disciples' faith was often the target of Jesus' teaching – when they failed or lacked faith Jesus rebuked them and led them into greater understanding.
- There is little evidence for one-to-one teaching relationships within Matthew – it all takes place in community or a small group.'

This pattern is largely repeated within the other gospels, although they do have different foci in their accounts of discipleship. Clearly, Jesus gathers together a group of disciples who spend significant time with him and their learning is based on seeing Jesus at work and experiencing his ministry with him as well as more formal learning. They are also privy to teaching and explanations of events that are not given to the crowds.²¹⁴

Although Peter appears to have a close relationship with Jesus, it is strikingly rare to find him (or any of the disciples) alone in a one-to-one encounter with Jesus. The consistent lack of reports of the disciples in one-to-one encounters and our knowledge of the social milieu of the day as being one where interaction as a community was the norm, in contrast to our Western extreme individualism, tend to suggest that such meetings would, indeed, have been rare. The accounts of Jesus' one-to-one encounters with non-disciples, such as with Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman at the well, are explicable because there were clearly defined special circumstances, i.e. Nicodemus came at night against the wishes of the community to which he belonged and the Samaritan woman was an outcast in her village. This raises the question of how Jesus' relationship with Peter and with the rest of the disciples influenced each other and we will briefly consider this now.

Group dynamics

The gospel writers have relatively little interest in describing the group dynamics surrounding the relationship Jesus had with Peter, for their focus is on Jesus and his identity. Peter is only directly reported as talking to anyone other than Jesus on four occasions,²¹⁵ and Jesus is reported as only addressing Peter either alone or in the presence of the other disciples rather than in more public situations. However, Peter's role as spokesman for the disciples does raise some interesting points.

It appears from the gospel accounts that both Jesus and the other disciples accepted Peter in this role.²¹⁶ It may well be that Jesus' renaming of Simon and his favouring him by staying in his house²¹⁷ meant that the other disciples accepted that he had a special leadership role to play and Jesus' later words and actions demonstrate this to be true.²¹⁸ Many commentators describe Peter as the first among equals and it is certainly true that his role was unique among the disciples, although that did not raise his status beyond the others – in fact it required him especially to be a servant.²¹⁹

Beyond this, it is perhaps most important to recognize, as we have previously, that Jesus calls the disciples into a community in order to learn. Although Peter might stand out, it is most frequently to the disciples as a group that the gospel writers refer and that Jesus directs his teaching. These experiences as a group certainly had a profound effect on Peter. With the other disciples, he watches at close hand as Jesus heals, challenges religious authority, teaches with his own authority in revolutionary ways and sets out a requirement of complete commitment for those who would follow him. We know that the combined effect of these experiences leads Peter to a point where, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he becomes the rock Jesus wants him to be, yet it is in community with others that we see him fulfilling this role in Acts.

It may be that the disciples accepted that Simon had a special role to play

214 e.g. Matt. 13:36 – the explanation of the parable of the weeds, Mark 8:14 – teaching on the yeast of the Pharisees, Luke 11:1 – the Lord's Prayer.

215 Matt. 17:24 – his discussion with the tax collectors about the Temple tax; John 13:24 when he requests the beloved disciple to ask Jesus a question; John 18:17ff (and parallel passages) when he denies Jesus, and John 21:3 when he tells the disciples he is going fishing. He is also presumably included in the references to the disciples discussing among themselves or arguing, although these too are relatively few.

216 Although, of course, we must not forget the discussions as to who was the greatest, there is no undercurrent of any other disciple seeking to rival Peter for his position, which given the frank exposure of the disciples' failings we might expect to see if it had been present.

217 Wiarda, *Peter*, p125 n14

218 i.e. Luke 22:33, Matt. 16:18

219 Mark 9:35

Moreover, even when Jesus singles Peter out as the rock, he intends to build his *ἐκκλησία* upon him, a word that we might better translate 'community'²²⁰ rather than 'church' to avoid thought of structures or buildings and to keep the focus on people in relationship. Peter's foundational role is to enable a new people to live together in relationship to Christ and each other.

An assessment using the relational proximity model

We have already seen that Jesus spends a great deal of time with Peter, involving him in an inner circle of three among the twelve disciples and occasionally spending time alone with him. Their relationship demonstrates strong continuity. To complement this, there is also significant multiplexity; Jesus makes his life available for Peter and the other disciples to watch.²²¹ They spend time together feasting, in physical danger and in ministry (healing and teaching). As a small group, they would have seen each other's most intimate habits²²² and they found themselves amongst thronging crowds in favour of Jesus and in the presence of those who vehemently opposed him. As we noted above, their life together and Jesus' discipleship method placed them in diverse situations that were particularly calculated by Jesus to impart understanding of who he was. Jesus' stay at Peter's house and the knowledge that probably gave him of Peter's other significant relationships with his wife, mother-in-law and others would also have contributed to deepening multiplexity in their relationship.

The directness in their relationship was also strong; not only was there extensive face-to-face contact but Jesus and Peter were clearly able to be honest with one another. Jesus allows Peter to see his emotional turmoil and he emotionally engages with Peter, for instance during the restoration after Jesus' resurrection. This leads to the issue of Parity. On one level Peter freely confesses Jesus' complete authority over him and

(eventually) accepts that he must obey Jesus. Even early in their encounters this comes through, albeit with a degree of reluctance: 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But *because you say so, I will let down the nets.*'²²³ Yet on another level Peter is comfortable approaching Jesus and voicing his opinion. Peter's delight and excitement in the relationship is made clear in John 21:7 as he jumps from the boat to be with Jesus. This is after his denial and the resurrection, where Jesus' ultimate authority is made clear. Jesus, then, has managed to establish parity in his relationship with Peter. Although his authority and power are absolute, the reward of being with him and the **humble, loving** way in which he handles that authority and power establish Parity. Moreover, the distribution of 'risk' in the relationship has initially been all upon him – he has died to make the relationship finally possible, he has trained and equipped Peter and will send the Holy Spirit. Peter must now follow where Jesus has led.²²⁴ The reward Jesus offers in the relationship is without parallel and Peter understands this as his later writings make clear:

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade...'²²⁵

Both Jesus and Peter are fully committed to the relationship and we should not miss the fact that Jesus calls Peter and the other disciples his friends.²²⁶

Finally, Jesus works to build commonality in the relationship. He has aligned his will with his Father's and expects Peter to do the same with him. Peter is clearly interested in the idea that Jesus might be the Messiah and this draws him to Jesus in the first place.²²⁷ Thereafter, Jesus challenges and shapes his understanding of what being the Messiah might mean, until, finally, he identifies with Jesus' purposes.

220 Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p471

221 Kirschner, although commenting on later rabbinic practice, provides helpful illumination: 'Even the master's most intimate habits and activities were subjected to careful scrutiny. Disciples followed him to the privy and the bath house; they studied his bedclothes and imputed significance to when and how he sneezed.' Kirschner, R. 'Imitatio Rabbini' *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, Vol XVII (1) pp70–79 (p70)

222 Including toilet and bathroom habits! See footnote 221.

223 Luke 5:5

224 John 21:18–19

225 1 Pet. 1:3–4. See to v9.

226 John 15:15

227 John 1:41

8. Conclusions

Although some conclusions have been drawn in the course of the study, we will now summarise them and draw them together under the three areas of interest highlighted in the introduction.

A relationship-sensitive hermeneutic

Our study of the gospels' genre highlighted the fact that characterisation is achieved through portrayal of a person's actions in general and their relationships in particular. Therefore, we need to develop a hermeneutic that is sensitive to the relationships being described, not only so that we can understand Jesus' relationships, but so that we can understand Jesus' character. To the extent that we try to study Jesus as opposed to studying Jesus-in-relationship we will miss out on who he truly is.

In particular, we need to keep asking questions about the relationships, including the webs of relationships that may not be specifically mentioned in any particular passage, as we study the gospels. For instance, this approach has, we believe, borne fruit in our study of the encounter with the woman with haemorrhages. Taking note of Jesus' relationships with Jairus, the crowd and his Father, and the relationships of the woman with the crowd, her own community and with God, added depth to our understanding of what was already a moving incident. It allowed us to see in new ways how **loving** and skilful Jesus' handling of this encounter was.

To really gain the benefit of this method, it will need to be applied consistently to a study of the whole of Jesus' life, but we suggest that the questions identified earlier in this paper provide a useful tool for beginning this task. In our study of Jesus, we need to keep asking, for every incident that we study:

1. Who is Jesus relating to?
2. What is the purpose of the relationship(s) involved?
3. What is the web of relationships surrounding the specific relationship(s) being studied?

4. Can we see any of the five dimensions of relational proximity operating?
5. Are Jesus' actions what we might expect in his time and culture or not?
6. What biblical (Old Testament) relational values are operating?
7. Does Jesus' teaching shed light on the way he is conducting the relationship in question?
8. What is Jesus trying to communicate in that incident and in the relationship as a whole?

Old Testament values

Throughout the study we have highlighted the ways in which Jesus perfectly lives out the relational values of the Old Testament. Although they were given as a paradigm for Israel as a corporate body, he lives them out as a personal paradigm. For instance, Jesus' **h̄sd**, **loyalty**, **love**, **faithfulness**, **compassion**, and **forgiveness** towards Peter are clear from his dealings with him. Yet, in **holiness** and obedience, Jesus does not waver from his calling to establish the Kingdom of God, which also involves his training and equipping of Peter to be the rock. Peter, an engagingly impulsive and enthusiastic man, is nevertheless sinful,²²⁸ wavering and sometimes directly at odds with the vocation that the Father has given to Jesus. Whilst Jesus would not break a bruised reed, he was prepared to speak powerfully into Peter's life about his and the Father's will and 'knock a few corners off' this tough²²⁹ Galilean fisherman when necessary. Moreover, whilst there are some slight echoes of relationships within the Old Testament, such as that between Elijah and Elisha, the relationship between Jesus and Peter (and the other disciples) is without parallel.

In the encounter with Jairus, his daughter and the haemorrhaging woman, Jesus similarly lives out these values. His **holiness** and commitment to his Father leads to his conversation with the marginalised woman in the face of a probably hostile crowd. His giving time and his full attention to each of these encounters mark out his **love** for those whom he met even briefly. These

228 He himself, uniquely among the disciples, is recorded as admitting this, Luke 5:8.

229 e.g. Peter wielding a sword, John 18:10.

are relatively familiar to us. However, we also see Jesus living out these values in ways that are perhaps only hinted at in the Old Testament.

Forgiveness

Jesus' practice of forgiveness in his relationships, especially in his relationship with Peter, was groundbreaking. He makes it clear through his life and teaching that forgiveness in interpersonal relationships is vital and to be given without limit. His own ministry and sacrifice on the cross would make possible the forgiveness of sins for the world and he prefigures this in the conduct of his earthly relationships, setting a model for us to follow.

Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness in relationships is vital

Holiness

Too frequently in the Judaism of Jesus' day, holiness was perceived as being about separation rather than engagement. Jesus develops the Old

Testament understanding of holiness as having a missional dimension; in his life and ministry he makes it something transformational. His holiness sanctifies those he is in relationship with and sets them on a path of transformation and change. The woman with haemorrhages was an obvious example, but Peter, too, was transformed by Jesus' holiness and commissioned to reach out to others, to be salt and light, transforming them.

Humility

The necessity of being humble before God was clear in the Old Testament, but Jesus is God himself living life in humility. He humbles himself before his Father in prayer and obedience. But more than this, he is humble towards his fellow human beings. When the crowd of mourners at Jairus's house mock him, he does not rebuke them, or justify himself, but serves Jairus. He washes Peter's feet and teaches him and the other disciples that interpersonal humility (humility before God being assumed) was the true mark of a leader. Humility becomes a defining characteristic of his life and ministry and of the life and ministry to which he calls his followers.

Hope

Jesus is the one who supremely brings hope in his relationships and through his presence. He embodies hope because of who he is and what he accomplished through his death and resurrection. In his encounters

with people he offers hope. The woman with haemorrhages came to touch him in the hope that she might be healed and then slip away. She left healed and hopeful for a new life in right relationship with God and the community around her.

Peter saw that Jesus had words of life, of hope, in a way that no-one else did. Jesus in his relationship with Peter kept him hoping and striving for a better future and a new way of living. He would become the rock, he would receive his reward, he would see the Kingdom of God. This hope kept Peter going and transformed him. Jesus offers this same transforming hope to us and through us to our world. Is it evident in our relationships?

From this brief study we can see that Jesus fulfils and lives out the Old Testament relational values in some surprising ways and further study of Jesus' relationships seems likely to provide us with similar insights. Jesus embodied these values in such a way as to transform those he was in relationship with. We are challenged to do the same in our relationships.

Lessons for our own relationships

Jesus' relationship with Peter should comfort and encourage us, for as we see him dealing lovingly, often gently, but, where necessary, firmly with this fallible disciple, we can be encouraged that he will do the same for us. He takes every opportunity to draw out Peter's faith and we know that he desires the same response from us. Moreover, it is *Jesus* who trains, equips and enables Peter to fulfil the role to which he is called in their relationship. Nevertheless, we should also be warned; Jesus is seeking those who will follow him and does not brook opposition to his vocation of establishing the Kingdom of God. Peter's relationship with Jesus required him to engage in a complete change of lifestyle, thought, habit and character and we should expect that Jesus will demand no less of us.

Jesus' relationship with Peter was loving and it was purposeful – wrapped in Jesus' commitment to obey his Father and his prophetic renaming of Peter. Just as Jesus drew Peter towards a closer understanding of who he was over time and trained him for leadership, are we conscious of how we are being taught to recognise Jesus' identity and greatness? Are we aware of how Jesus is training us and his purpose(s) for our lives?

Are our relationships surrendered to his purposes? Relationship with him requires us to take on the priorities of his Kingdom and promote them in our other relationships. This will not reduce them to mechanistic interchanges, for his fundamental

requirement for relationships is that they should be characterized by love. Jesus recognized the need for fun and celebration – how else was he labelled as someone too fond of a party?²³⁰ Yet, just as Jesus drew Peter, and is drawing us into a deeper understanding of who he is, we need to do the same with others. This is a requirement with our Christian and our non-Christian friends, and although there is urgency in the task, it is not something that we can achieve instantly and should not try to. Jesus spent three years with Peter and clearly worked with his weaknesses – sometimes confronting, at other points not.

Jesus' relationship with Peter also challenges our individualism. Their primary relating was in a group context; Peter had to work out his individual calling to follow Jesus in that same group context. The relationship also challenges our discipleship models. Whilst teaching played a large part in the disciples' training, it was given in the context of 'hands-on' exposure to ministry and handling opposition. Jesus opened his life so that the disciples could learn from it and this challenges us to do the same. We can object that our life is not worth learning from, but that is precisely why we need to accept this challenge. Paul strikingly writes to several of his churches telling them

to imitate him. Even if we are not called into pastoral ministry, we are likely to have some responsibility for demonstrating the reality of a relationship with Jesus to a cell group, children or someone who does not yet know him. We at least should have our lives open to a small group of Christians so that we can learn from Jesus together, alongside one another, in community.

Jesus' relationship with Jairus, his daughter and the woman with haemorrhages challenges us to think about how we respond to those around us, especially in pressured situations. To what extent are we sensitive to the Spirit's prompting and to the needs of others? Moreover, we are challenged to give full attention and value to even the briefest encounter.

Finally, Jesus challenges us to be other-person-centred in the way that we relate, utilizing the natural gifts that he gives us to the full. At the same time we must seek the Spirit's gifting to use our natural abilities, whilst praying that we might be spiritually gifted to relate, as Jesus did, in ways beyond our natural ability so that we can truly love our neighbours. If we do so, we can hope and expect to see the kind of transformation in our own lives and in the lives of others that comes from being in relationship with Jesus.

230 Luke 7:34

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