**Family** dkm June 2023

Personal relationships are important, indeed essential, for every human being. Our secular society recognises this, even as it works hard to destroy relationships, especially the marriage relationship, but also the parent-child relationship. It was just seventy years ago that an organisation called ‘Relationships Australia’ began. It began as a marriage guidance centre but now, with government funding, employs hundreds of counsellors. It is a secular, non-religious organisation, promoting the values of our society. The only relationship not pictured on their website is a man and a woman with children! They exist to help the increasing number of lonely people in our society, people often lonely because of marriage and family breakdown.

Many look for deeper relationships in the workplace, or maybe on the sporting field, or in the watching crowd. Some depend upon the workplace for their only personal interactions- they may have a pet at home but this is not a personal interaction! In an office I once worked in, an employee was always wanting to have drinks after work or a weekend party. There is nothing wrong with this except that I, like others, wanted to go home to my family; I later heard that her family was breaking down. Where do you find personal relationships? Do you consider Jesus your friend, or a brother? Jesus had his own biological family of course, but he speaks about personal relationships beyond this family. What was, and is, the nature of his relationship with his followers or disciples?

God created the family as the basis for society, but he also ordained the man and the woman to have a relationship with himself. God came to Adam in the garden to talk with him and have communion with him- this was before they disobeyed God, and sin entered the world. God planned to restore this communion or relationship with himself through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The coming of sin also played havoc with relationships within the family God created.

But not all human beings accept this gracious act of God through his own beloved Son. They want no relationship with God through repentance and forgiveness of sin. They do not want to follow what God has ordained for his creation with regard to human relationships- or other relationships for that matter (Prov 12:10)! Atheistic societies, as seen in communism, try to destroy the family, and secular societies like ours want to do the same because they hate the good that God has created. It was not long after the Relationships Australia organisation began that no-fault divorce was legislated, and more recently, same-sex marriage. When God made man and put him in the garden everything was good, with one man and one woman joined for life. God affirmed the family as the basis for human society when he sent his only begotten Son into this world, ‘born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons’ (Gal 4:4,5).

One day Jesus’ mother and brothers came looking for him as he taught and healed people in Galilee. They could not get to speak to him because of the crowd, but did get a message to him. When Jesus got the message he said something quite strange. He looked at the people around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ (Mark 3:34). He looked beyond his biological family to the family of God, declaring unrelated individuals listening to his words as belonging to his spiritual family. He said, ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’ (Mark 3:35). Do you know Jesus as your friend, and even more closely, as your brother?