



Relationships that give you meaning and purpose in life.

All world cultures, religions, and philosophies teach that relationships are important. People have friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationships. You have academic or business relationships at your work place. In our world of nations, there are powerful political relationships and influential international relationships. Good societies depend on healthy relationships that have trust, honor, and good communication.

If God exists, can God make any difference in your relationships? During this course, we will discover and discuss what the Bible says about the most important relationships. And is it possible to have a personal relationship with God?

COURSE OUTLINE for *Dynamic Relationships*

1. Relationships are good gifts.
2. Honor, respect, and four kinds of love.
3. God is the mystery and model for relationships.
4. Older teachers, coaches, and mentors.
5. Romantic relationships.
6. Marriage relationships.
7. Relating to your parents.
8. Employment relationships.
9. Relating to governments.
10. Hope for international relations.
11. What breaks relationships?
12. God's answer for broken relationships.

Dynamic Relationships

Dynamic



Relationships

Do your relationships determine who you are?

All world cultures, religions, and moral philosophies teach that relationships are important. People have friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationships. You have academic or business relationships in your work place. There are political and international relationships. Human societies depend on relationships of respect and trust.

Can you introduce yourself and not make any reference to your family or to your nationality? “Hello, my name is _____ and I come from _____.” We view ourselves and evaluate our lives based on our human relationships. “I am Mr. _____’s son.” “I am the husband of _____.” “Ms. _____ is my faculty advisor.” “I am the friend of _____.”

In western cultures, a person may be introduced as “Tom” (a popular given name) and then, “Smith” (a person’s surname or family name). In East Asian cultures, a person may be introduced as “Zhou” (a common family name), and then “Wei” (a given name). This cultural difference is revealing! In the west, people often define themselves as “individuals.” Western societies produce entrepreneurs, but also produce lonely people. In Eastern cultures, a person’s identity is more connected to the group or family to which he or she belongs.

Ask the international friends at your table if they think this is a true observation in their personal lives and home cultures.

Are your relationships your “gods”?

Relationships *influence* who you are and what you do. But do relationships *determine* your identity and your personal value? Do relationships make you? Or, were you made for relationships?



The philosopher Confucius (K’ung Fu-tzu, B.C. 551-479) taught that there are five principal human relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, friend and friend. Your place in society and your duty in life are based on relationships. When you honor these relationships, the result will be harmony in society. Confucianism is an ethical system of behavior and conduct. K’ung Fu-tzu was not very interested in the idea of God or the place of religion in a society.

But here is a problem: If there is no God, then your relationships can become your substitute for God. If your relationship with your parent, your friend, or your employer is good and healthy, then you are happy. But, what if you expect a human relationship to provide your ultimate meaning and purpose? Then, if your most important relationship fails, you may feel devastated.

What if there is a God? Can God make a difference in your relationships? During this course, we will discover what the Bible says about the relationships in your life. Is it possible for you to have a personal relationship with God?

Notes:

philosophy: a love or seeking for wisdom by mental or moral means. “PhD” = “Doctor of Philosophy.”

entrepreneurs: people who take personal risks, organize, innovate and operate new businesses.

ultimate: the most important, most essential, or final reality for your life.

devastated: to be overpowered with sadness or grief.

Week 1: Relationships are Good Gifts

Dynamic Relationships

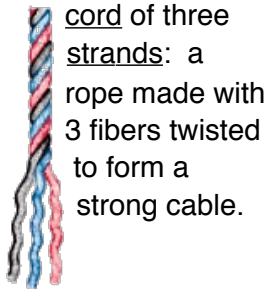
Notes:

mentor: an older, wiser person who is more experienced, who can guide your life and work.

toil: very hard work.

content: satisfied with your life and the results of your hard work. (another English word with the same spelling means “material.”)

deprive: to deny or take away from yourself: not allow yourself to enjoy something.



cord of three strands: a rope made with 3 fibers twisted to form a strong cable.

debt, outstanding: what you still owe, unpaid obligation.

Debts can be either financial or moral.

We are required by law - human laws, and God's law - to pay off our debts.

covet: to want something that is not yours.

fulfillment: to complete, pay, and fulfill your obligations, to people or God.

In the coming weeks, we will discuss many kinds of human relationships: with teachers, mentors, parents, friends, husbands, wives, bosses, and government officials. This week, we examine some short Bible sections that describe different relationships. Relationships are good gifts. We can enjoy them with appreciation for God who gives us these relationships. But we must not substitute these good gifts for the good Giver.

From the Bible



Genesis 2:18: The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Ecclesiastes 4:7: Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: ⁸ There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” (the man) asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless — a miserable business! ⁹ Two (men) are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ¹¹ Also, if two (people) lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one (person) keep warm alone? ¹² Though one (person) may be overpowered, two (people) can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Romans 13:7: Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. ⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Discuss



1. In what circumstances have you felt most “alone”?
When do international students get lonely?
2. Genesis 2: What is “not good”? What did God provide for man?
3. Eccles. 4:7-8: In observing real life, what seems “meaningless”?
4. Eccles. 4:8-12: What practical benefits come from relationships?
5. Eccles. 4:10-12: What are some risks from being alone in life?
6. Romans 13: What relationships are described? Which relations require respect and honor, and which relationships require love?
7. Romans 13: What fulfills God's law? Who is your “neighbor”?

Chapter Summary



It is not good to be alone. God provides us relationships to give us warmth, protection, social order, and meaning in life.

Dynamic Relationships

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Relationships

What are your obligations in relationships?

Last week, we introduced the importance of relationships. Human relationships are important, but they must not become ultimate in our lives. Relationships are God's good gifts. But they must not become your "gods." Family, friends, teachers, and employers are meaningful and influential. But do they define your identity? Do they determine who you are?

The Bible teaches that different relationships require different obligations. *Give everyone what you owe ... If you owe taxes, pay taxes ... if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.* (Romans 13:7-8) So, then ask yourself:

- "What do I owe to my **family**?" How much time should I spend with my wife, husband, and children each week? How often should I phone my parents?
- "What do I owe my **employer**?" How many hours should I spend at work?
- "What do I owe my **government**?" Should I spend time serving in the military? What amount of taxes do I owe? When I "pledge allegiance", is my loyalty to my home nation or adopted country limited - or is my loyalty unlimited?

Obligations are described with financial words like *owe*, *spend*, *pay*, and *debt*. You *owe* an apology when you do something wrong to your friend. You *spend* \$500 to *pay* your auto mechanic who repaired your car. You *pay* respect to your parents who provided you with food and clothing when you were a child. Your obligations are like *debts* that you *owe* in different human relationships.

What is your ultimate obligation?

What you *owe* will depend on the nature of your relationships. Teachers, rulers, and other people have authority *over us*. So we say that we *owe them respect* or are *obligated to honor* them. The Bible teaches our duties to people who have authority over us.

But should any human relationship - with your rulers, teachers, or parents - have absolute authority? The Bible teaches that no one has absolute authority - except God. Only God is the "LORD over all". When people claim to have absolute authority, they often abuse or harm people who are under their rule.

What about relationships with friends or family who are more like "equals"? Your highest obligation in friend and family relationships is love. The original language of the Bible's New Testament (Greek) is very precise to define four different levels and distinct forms of love:

- **Natural** love. You cannot choose family. Relatives may demand your loyalty.
- **Friendship** love. Friends can choose to share interests, goals, or activities.
- **Emotional** love. Physical attraction or a passionate desire: "falling in love."
- **Chosen** love. To decide to love unselfishly, sacrificially, as God loves people.

Notes:

obligations: the social, legal, and moral duties that are required in all relationships.

ultimate: the most important, most essential, or final reality for your life.

to pledge allegiance: to promise your loyalty to your country, king, group, or ruler.

absolute authority: total, complete, or unlimited power over someone.

abuse: to misuse, take advantage of, mistreat, injure.

precise: exact, very accurate.

Notes:

Submit: to obey or subject yourself to another person's orders.

supreme: highest, like "Supreme Court."

for the Lord's sake: to obey human authority out of respect for God's absolute authority.

cover-up: to claim you have "freedom" to do what is wrong.

fear God: highest respect = reverence.

instituted: created or appointed by God; God's plan for a harmonious society.

silence the ignorant talk of foolish men:

in the 1st century, some people said that, if you believe Jesus is Lord, you could not be a loyal citizen of the Roman empire. Do people today say if you become a Christian you aren't loyal to your nation?

brotherhood of believers: when people become Christians, they become like family - spiritual brothers and sisters.

inherit: to have or to receive the right to enjoy eternal life with God.

Week 2: Honor, respect, and four kinds of love Dynamic Relationships

This week, we look at some Bible sections that describe our obligations in different relationships. We also consider the question of loyalty to God - who gives all of these relationships to us.

From the Bible



1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Luke 10:25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" [Jesus] replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ [The law expert] answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

1 John 4:9 This is how God showed his love among us: [God] sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Discuss



1. To what people do you give honor and respect?
2. Describe a situation in which you have practiced:
 - **Natural** love - loyalty to a family member.
 - **Friendship** love - when you share goals and experiences.
 - **Emotional** love - when you were attracted to someone.
 - **Chosen** love - when you **decided** to **sacrifice** for someone.
3. 1 Peter 2:13-15: Why should people submit to human authorities?
4. 1 Peter 2:16: How do some people misuse their "freedom"?
5. 1 Peter 2:17: To whom should we show respect? honor? fear? love?
6. Luke 10:25: What question did the law expert ask Jesus?
7. Luke 10:26: How did Jesus reply to the law expert's question?
8. Luke 10:27: According to the law expert, what do we owe to God? Why do you think we love ourselves more than God?
9. 1 John 4:9: Do you think God has any obligation to love people? How did God demonstrate his love for the world?

Chapter Summary



We have different obligations in different relationships. Only God has absolute authority. We owe God everything and God owes us nothing. But God chose to show unselfish love in his Son Jesus Christ.

Dynamic Relationships

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Relationships

What is the model for our relationships?

Human relationships are a mystery. How can people, who are different, live together in unity? How do you relate to another person - but not lose your own personal identity?

For example, a man and a woman are two different persons. But if a man and a woman become a husband and wife, they form the nucleus of one new family. The two become one.

The idea of the modern university was influenced by the Bible's view of God. There may be different fields of knowledge, with students in multiple colleges, but all in a uni-versity. Many fields of study come together in one university.

Think about the challenge of diversity in the world's nations. People come from different cultures and ethnic groups. Some citizens are a majority and others are a minority. The United States' national motto is, "out of many, one." Is it possible for all ethnic groups to live together in harmony, as one nation?

The ultimate mystery: God exists in relationship.

Christians believe the Bible reveals a mystery about God's nature.

God is greater than human minds. This mystery is called the trinity:

- That there is *one* living and true God.
- That this one God eternally exists as *three Persons*: God the *Father*, God the *Son* (who came to earth as Jesus), and God the *Holy Spirit*.

This is a mystery - even for people who follow Christ. The word trinity is not found in the Bible. But trinity describes this great mystery about God's nature. The blessing of God is: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* (2 Corinthians 13:14)

For centuries, Christian scholars have tried to explain this mystery. A famous illustration is the "three states of water - as liquid, gas, and ice." Saint Patrick (Ireland, 385-461) tried to explain God with a three-leaf clover. But all these illustrations suggest that God exists in three forms, not as three Persons.

Augustine (North Africa, 354-430) described a "trinity" of human memory, knowledge, and love. But these exist in a single person, not in three Persons. One day, Augustine walked along a beach, thinking about God as the trinity. A boy was running with a bucket, pouring ocean water into a hole in the sand. Augustine asked the child, "What are you doing?" The boy said, "I am trying to put the ocean into this hole." Augustine realized that he was trying to put the infinite God into his finite mind. But you cannot reduce God to fit your brain.

The Orthodox (Greek, Russian) Church illustrates the trinity as a dance. God eternally exists as three equal Persons dancing in a circle of joy, love, and inter-dependence. The Bible teaches that humans are made in God's image - to reflect God's nature in human community. Can we join this loving dance of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - in a dynamic relationship?

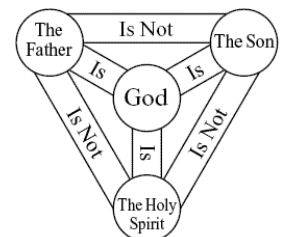
Notes:

mystery: true, but greater than our ability to explain.

ultimate: what is most important, most essential, or final reality for life.

trinity: a word that describes 1 God in 3 Persons. The Christian church summarized the Bible's teaching in 325 at the Council of Nicaea (modern Turkey). Today, Christians around the world say the Nicene creed - to summarize their beliefs about God.

Trinity illustrations:



Notes:

ultimate: what is most important, most essential, or final reality for life.

eternal life: life that does not end with physical death. Life with God in heaven.

glory: fame, respect, or honor.

glorify: To receive a good opinion, to get "face" or to receive a good status in the presence of people.

presence: before the face of God.

complete unity: the perfecting, fulfilling, or the completing of relationships in unity and love.

Righteous: just, right, in a right relationship.

Week 3: God is the mystery and model for relationships Dynamic Relationships

This week, we learn how Jesus Christ prays about important relationships. God is the ultimate in relationships. God's Son prays to God the Father. Jesus also prays for his followers on earth - in all places and all times. God exists in a perfect community of love - one God in three Persons. Jesus wants his followers to show the world unity in diversity and love.

From the Bible



John 17:1-3, 20-26: 3 Now this is eternal life: that [my followers] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

4 I have brought you [Father] glory on earth by completing the work you [Father] gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me [your Son] in your presence with the glory I [your Son] had with you before the world began ...

20 "My prayer is not for [my first followers] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through [my followers'] message, 21 [I pray] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that [my followers] may be one as we are one: 23 I [Christ] in them and you [Father] in me. May [my followers] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me [Your Son] because you loved me before the creation of the world.

25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and [my followers] know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you [Father] have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Discuss



1. Verse 3: How is eternal life found in a relationship?
2. Verse 4: How did God the Son honor God the Father?
3. Verse 5: Describe the Son's past and future relationship with the Father.
4. Verses 20-21: *Who* did Jesus pray for? *For what goal* did Jesus pray?
5. Verses 22-23: What is the glory that Jesus gives to his followers?
6. Verse 23: What does the world learn when Christians show unity?
7. Verse 24: What is the ultimate model of loving community?
8. Verses 25-26: What do Jesus' followers know and experience?

Chapter Summary



"God is the only properly functioning community in the whole universe." Timothy S. Lane and Paul D. Tripp, *Relationships*

God exists in perfect unity - one God in three Persons. We all want and need relationships. Only God can give us a perfect relationship. Jesus invites us into the only community that lasts forever. When we begin to understand God's nature, we begin to understand human relationships.

Dynamic Relationships

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Relationships

Role Models for Relationships

We have seen that the Bible describes God as the ultimate model for all human relationships. The Bible teaches a mystery - that God is a perfect community of Persons.

God is perfect and ultimate in relationships. But we also need less-than-perfect models for our relationships. Some of the role models that we need in life are:

- **Teachers:** Because you should always be learning, you need teachers at every stage of life. Your first teachers were parents or grandparents. You had elementary and secondary school teachers. Then, college and graduate school professors. Did you ever receive religious instruction? Teachers are people who give you **knowledge**. You may be educated formally with books and classes, or informally - with personal instruction.
- **Coaches:** Teachers give you knowledge, but coaches train your **skills**. You can learn knowledge from books, classes, and doing assignments. But you can only improve your skills by training in real life experiences. There are *athletic* coaches - to train football or soccer athletes. There are *executive* coaches - who train you in leadership skills. While teachers focus on what you *know*, coaches focus on your behavior - what you *do*.
- **Mentors** are older and more experienced people who give you **wisdom**, **confidence**, and **character**. Mentors are wise and trusted counselors who help you make good decisions for your life and career. A person can be intelligent, educated, talented, and skilled - but still fail in real life. If a mentor gives you wisdom from their own career or life experience, you will be more confident in your own life. Some companies have mentoring programs that assign advisors to new employees. But true mentors are like “fathers and mothers” who inspire you to both **be** and **do** your best.

You need all kinds of older people in your life!

You need dynamic relationships with older people who have more knowledge, skill, and experience - teachers, coaches, and mentors.

After starting a career, some internationals think they do not advance as fast as other employees. They were at the “top of their class”, but fall behind other employees - who may be less intelligent, and do not work as hard. What may be missing? “Social skills” or “people skills” - not technical skills.

- You get a job because of your academic and technical abilities.
- You get promoted because you have ability to manage other people.
- You get a leadership position because of your ability to communicate.

A new, young C.E.O. asked his company’s founder: “How did you succeed?” The retiring C.E.O. answered, “Good decisions.” “Sir, how did you make good decisions?” The old man said, “Wisdom.” “But, sir, how did you learn wisdom?” And the old man smiled at the younger man: “By making bad decisions.”

Notes:

ultimate: what is most important, most essential, or final reality for life.

formally: in a structured and planned way.

informally: in an unstructured way or environment.

門徒

The formal Chinese term for *disciple* is 門徒 or mén tú. (The informal term is: 徒弟 or tú dì).

And the traditional character 門徒 pictures a disciple 徒 who sits at the door or gate 門 of his master or mentor.

Dynamic Relationships

Notes:

disciples, Twelve: Jesus' first twelve (12) followers.

Jerusalem: the Jews' capital city.

Son of Man: Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man who was described in the Old Testament book of Daniel. God gives his Son authority to rule over all people. God sent his Son to be this Son of Man.

Gentiles: people who are not Jews. Refers here to the Romans, who did not believe in the God of the Bible.

lord it over: to rule over, to use power or force.

mock: to treat with ridicule or contempt.

flog: to beat or whip.

the cup, baptized: Jesus is asking his disciples if they can share in his death. In Christian worship, the cup and washing with water illustrate union with Christ.

to grant: to give.

indignant: to become angry or offended.

ransom: the price you must pay to set someone free, to purchase freedom for another person.

Teachers help you to **know**. They **educate** you. **Coaches** help you to **do**. They **train** you. **Mentors** focus on both - who you **are** and what you **do**. They **inspire** you. Jesus wants his followers [徒] to enter the door [门] to find God's meaning and purpose. In the following Bible section, did Jesus educate, train, or inspire his followers? Is Jesus a teacher, coach, or more?

From the Bible



Mark 10:32-45: ³² [The disciples] were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way ... those who followed were afraid. [Jesus] took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he [Jesus] will rise."

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" [Jesus] asked. ³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Discuss



1. Verse 32: Where was Jesus leading his followers?
2. Verses 32-34: How did those following Jesus feel? What was going to happen to Jesus?
3. Verse 35: What did James and John call Jesus?
4. Verses 35-37: What did James and John ask Jesus to give them?
5. Verses 38-40: How did Jesus challenge this ambitious request?
6. Verse 41: What offended the other disciples?
7. Verse 42: What usually makes people appear to be "great"?
8. Verses 43-44: What makes Jesus' followers great?
9. Verse 45: How was Jesus the perfect Servant-Leader?

Chapter Summary



The disciples called Jesus "Teacher." Jesus trained his followers to become great by humbly serving other people. But Jesus is the ultimate inspiration. Jesus Christ gave his life to set many people free.

Dynamic Relationships

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Relationships

Romance around the World

Romantic love is a powerful human emotion. Physical and emotional attraction between people is a dynamic force in all social relationships. This is true around the world. Some people claim that “love makes the world go around.” How do people in your home culture “fall in love”? With the friends at your table, share your different cultural ideas.

Before you arrived as a foreign student or international scholar, you probably saw romantic relationships as shown in Hollywood movies and television.

- Based on popular images that you saw in the media before you arrived, what did you expect to find about romantic relationships in America?
- Are the relationships you now observe like or different from those movies?
- What can Americans learn from romance in your home culture?
- Are American love relationships more or less modest than in your nation?

In many countries, traditional marriages are not based on dating or romance, but on decisions made by families. Do you marry for love, or marry for status? Young adults sometimes compare “love marriages” with “arranged marriages.”

- How important is romance in your home culture? How do people “date”?
- Which is traditional in your home country - “love” or “arranged” marriage?
- Are there some benefits in traditional or “arranged” relationships?
- How do people display or show their romantic feelings in your country?

The Bible and Romantic Love

The Bible is 5,000 years old. It was written in traditional cultures. So we are not surprised to find arranged marriages in the Bible. But the Bible is also positive about romantic love. Parts of the Bible can even shock you. There are vivid descriptions of romantic, passionate love.

The Bible says that romantic love is a good gift from God. But the Bible warns that romantic love is not ultimate. If your love for a man or a woman becomes your ultimate passion, you may think that you cannot live without that person. Being “in love” becomes your life goal. If you become addicted to romantic love for someone, you can be abused by that person. You can feel empty when you are not “in love” or worthless when you do not receive love.

The Bible teaches there is one ultimate love - God’s love for you, and your love response for God. Romance cannot give you what only God can give. Romantic love is a good gift, but a bad “god”. Be careful if you think, “If I have this person in my life, I will be happy.” When you substitute romance for God’s love, you can become love-sick. Attraction to someone can turn into slavery. Romance can lead to destructive, instead of dynamic relationships. “... A good thing has become a counterfeit god when its demands on you exceed proper boundaries.” [Timothy Keller] What are the benefits and limits of romantic love?

Notes:

romance,
romantic: a strong desire or a passionate attraction for another person.

modest: to show restraint, not too excessive and not too public.

ultimate: the most important, most essential, or final reality for your life.

addicted: controlled or dependent on something that is habit-forming.

abused: harmed.

counterfeit: a fake copy, a bad substitute for what is real. To appear to be something more valuable, like counterfeit (fake) money.

Notes:

Song of Songs:

The book's title claims that this is the best song on married love ever: love songs written by King Solomon for his wife.

fragrance: aroma.

perfumes: lotions that have an attractive odor.

chambers: bedroom

I charge: I warn you: Don't do this!

arouse: to stir up or to stimulate your passions.

until it so desires: love should only be expressed at the right *times*, in the right *places*, with the right *person*.

quench: to put out, extinguish a fire.

flee: run away.

sexual immorality: sexual relations outside marriage.

temple: religions have temples - holy places where you meet God. God gives the Holy Spirit to live inside Christians - to make them holy people in the world.

bought at a price: to buy a slave's freedom. Jesus died to set people free from slavery to their passions.

passionate lust: strong desire or appetite to do what is wrong. A strong craving that controls you.

Week 5: Romantic Relationships Dynamic Relationships

The Bible teaches about romantic love and the limits of physical attraction. Today, some people worship physical beauty. But public sexuality offends more modest lifestyles. What do we learn from these Bible sections?

From the Bible



Song of Songs 1:2 ... your love is more delightful than wine. ³ Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume ...

⁴ Take me away with you - let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers ...

^{2:3} Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade ... ⁴ He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love ... ⁷ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you ... Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

^{8:6} Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. ⁷ Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away ...

1 Corinthians ^{6:18} Flee from sexual immorality ... ¹⁹ your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you ... received from God. You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Thessalonians ^{4:3} It is God's will that you ... avoid sexual immorality;

⁴ ... each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like [people] who do not know God;

⁶ and that ... no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him ...

⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, [the person] who rejects this instruction does not reject man but [rejects] God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Discuss



1. Song 1:2: What is the love of king Solomon like?
2. Song 1:3: What attracted the wife to the king?
3. Song 1:4: Where did the king's wife want to go for romance?
4. Song 2:3: How did the wife feel when she was alone with the king?
5. Song 2:4: How did the wife feel when at a public event with the king?
6. Song 2:7: What does the woman's warning mean? (see note).
7. Song 8:6-7: How strong is love? What is love's power compared to?
8. 1 Corinthians 6:18: What should you run *from* - and not run *to*?
9. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: What are two reasons for Christians to honor God in how they use their bodies?
10. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4: What is God's will for people who know God?
11. 1 Thessalonians 4:5-6: How can passionate lust harm other people?
12. 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8: What power does God give for a holy life?

Chapter Summary



Romance is God's gift for the right time, right place, and with the right person. When we worship physical beauty more than we desire or love God, then we dishonor God and bring harm to the lives of other people.

Dynamic Relationships

Dynamic



Relationships

Marriage around the world

We have discussed how dating and courtship customs can be different in the world's cultures. In traditional cultures, marriages may be arranged by two families. Modern cultures may practice dating and "love marriages." Romantic feelings can be expressed differently in different cultures - either in modest private ways or by public displays of love.

In Hindu culture, marriage is a spiritual relationship that unites two souls and their families for future generations. The ceremony is meant to unite two souls so firmly that after marriage, even though a man's and woman's bodies seem to be separate, their souls have merged to become one harmonious whole.

In modern China, traditions mix with current fashions. The wedding banquet (xi jiu, 喜酒, or "joyful wine") may be more important than the ceremony. The happy couple enters a banquet room, greeted with rose petals and applause. To show respect, tea and wine are presented to the parents and the guests. In Confucianism, marriage promotes families and cultivates virtues in society.

Though wedding ceremonies and traditions are different around the world, one thing is the same: marriage is important for families and for society.

Marriage in the Bible

The Bible teaches that marriage is God's gift for *all human beings*.

No matter your nation or religion, marriage is God's gift for *all humans*.

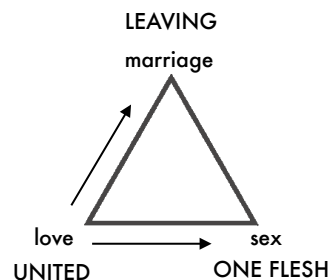
Individuals can become families - no longer alone, but happy and fulfilled during their lives on earth. *"The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"* (Genesis 2:18)

Since marriage is universal, it is taught at the beginning of the Bible - before people were divided into separate nations, cultures, or languages. But what is unique about marriage in the Bible? First, marriage is not eternal. Marriage is only for this life. Human marriage ends when a husband or a wife dies. Second, marriage does not unite or merge families. You must honor your own parents, but marriage starts a new family - into which children may be born.

The Bible summarizes marriage like this: *"A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* (Genesis 2:24)

Dr. Walter Trobisch, an author, minister, and an advisor to young African couples illustrated marriage with a helpful triangle diagram.

As Dr. Trobisch teaches in his book *I Married You*, sexual love - becoming *one flesh* with someone - requires your commitment to *leave your father and mother* so that you can be *united* to your husband or your wife. In other words, real intimacy requires your commitment to a life-long marriage.



Notes:

courtship: how a man and woman relate before they are engaged or officially pledged to be married.

modest: to be restrained, to be private, shy, not excessive or too public.

rose petals: the "leaves" of the rose flower.

eternal: with no end, everlasting, not limited to this life or to time.

intimacy: a close, personal relation, to share a sexual relationship.

Notes:

motives: what makes you want to do something. Heart motivation, not what society expects you to do.

submit: to respect a person's role as leader. Note that the Bible does not teach that women have less dignity or ability than men. A woman can be a great CEO! But, in marriage or family, a wife should want her husband to serve as the family leader.

reverence: to honor with respect and worship.

holy: to grow in purity and virtue.

radiant: bright and beautiful.

blemish: a small imperfection.

Week 6: Marriage Relationships Dynamic Relationships

Marriage is important in all societies, religions, and cultures. Christians believe that marriage is God's gift - to promote happiness and God's glory. The Bible gives Jesus' followers powerful motives for their marriages — to reflect God's love. Paul, an ambassador of Christ, writes a letter to husbands and wives in Ephesus (a city in modern Turkey). Christian marriages should reflect the dynamic relationship between Christ and the church.

From the Bible



Ephesians 5:21-33: ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit to your husbands as [you show respect] to the Lord.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, [Christ's] body, of which [Christ] is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and [Christ] gave himself up for [the church] ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. [The husband] who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but [the man] feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church — ³⁰ for we are members of [Christ's] body.

³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you [Christian husbands] also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the [Christian] wife must respect her husband.

Discuss



1. Verse 21: What motivates all Christians to show respect?
2. Verses 22-24 instruct *wives* and verses 25-31 instruct *husbands*. Who receives more instructions?
3. Verse 22: Why should a wife submit to a husband's leadership?
4. Verses 23-24: How is the church described? How is Jesus described?
5. How should the church (Christians) be like a bride?
6. Verse 25: How should husbands love their wives? How did Jesus love his bride — the church?
7. How did Jesus "give himself up" for the church? What are some ways that a husband can "give himself up" for his wife?
8. Verses 26-27: For what purpose did Jesus sacrifice for the church?
9. Verses 28-30: How is the church like a body as well as a bride?
10. Verses 31-32: Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. Who did Christ leave? Who did Jesus Christ come to earth to unite with — spiritually?
11. Verse 33: How does Paul summarize his teaching?

Chapter Summary

Healthy marriages are important for a healthy society. This is true in all cultures. God gives Christian husbands and wives the highest motivations and goals - to reflect God's love in Jesus Christ.



Dynamic Relationships

Dynamic



Relationships

How important are your parents?

When international students observe American or European families, it seems that Western young people do not always respect their parents, grandparents, and older relatives.

One Chinese scholar, who studied in Germany, compared Western and Asian attitudes toward the elderly with these diagrams. Which is more Western? Which is more Asian?

Westerners could learn to respect their parents and grandparents from their international friends. In most cultures, elderly people stay involved in family activities and are included in daily life.

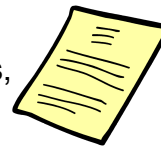


In last week's Bible discussion, we read: *A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife...* (Genesis 2:24). When you marry, should your parents keep an important place in your new family? How much time should you spend with your parents or with your grandparents?

- You have traveled far from home. How often do you call your family?
- In what ways do you try to honor your elderly relatives while you are here?
- What must you do - and what must you *not* do - to stay loyal to your family?

Respect or Reverence?

We learn our beliefs and family values from parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. Our parents have made big sacrifices for us. They have spent time and money to help us succeed as adults.



But your parents can also put pressure on you. If you make good grades, if you are accepted at a top university - these things honor your family. But if you fail to succeed, or do not perform with excellence, this shames your family. In many countries, a successful adult child will be the parents' future security.

- Did your parents help you plan your choice of university?
- How much did your parents help you decide on your major or your career?
- In what ways do you plan to relate to your parents when you are 40 years old?

Westerners put a high priority on individual achievement and personal effort. An American may say, "I feel like doing this" or, "I want to study engineering." An Asian may have greater respect for social duties and family obligations. Asian scholars may say, "I was *expected* to do this - and I *should* do this."

- Do you experience tension between your personal and family responsibilities?

In cultures influenced by the teachings of Confucius (K'ung Fu-tzu), there is a practice of filial piety (孝道, xiào dào). To achieve a good society, you must be good to elders, support your parents, and bring a good name to your family. In traditional cultures, this may include sacrifices to your parents and ancestors. This looks like "ancestor worship" to an outsider. What does the Bible say? Should your honor and respect for parents become worship and reverence?

Notes:

forsake: to give up, to turn away from, or to abandon.

due: What you owe. What God deserves is honor and respect for God's authority.

worthy of me: the honor and respect Jesus deserves.

We honor parents, but Jesus is God's Son. So Jesus is worthy of worship.

in the Lord; do not exasperate: Do not provoke or make angry. These express limits to human authority and obedience. Children should obey parents — unless parents command you to dishonor God. And parents should not abuse authority or harm their children.

Week 7: Relating to your parents Dynamic Relationships

The Bible commands us to honor and respect our parents. When we are infants and children, parents are our highest authority. But as adults, our top priority is to love and obey God. We continue to honor and respect our parents, but we must only worship God — the perfect Father in heaven.

From the Bible



Exodus 20:12: ¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Proverbs 1:8: ⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Malachi 1:6: ⁶ A son honors his father, and a servant [respects] his master. If I [the LORD] am a Father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD Almighty.

Matthew 10:37: [Jesus said] ³⁷ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

John 5:19-20 ¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; [the Son] can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows [the Son] all [the Father] does ... [anyone] who does not honor the Son does not honor [God] the Father who sent him.

Ephesians 6:1-4: ¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" — which is the first commandment with a promise — ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." ⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Discuss



1. Exodus 20:12: This is one of God's 10 Commandments — one of ten moral absolutes. What did God command? What does God promise to obedient children?
2. Proverbs 1:8: A father speaks to his son. What should a son *do* and *not do*? Who gives wise teaching and instruction to this son?
3. Malachi 1:6: God describes proper human relationships. How do sons relate to fathers? How should servants relate to masters? How do people relate to God?
4. Matthew 10:37: Who must we love more than our parents? Why is Jesus worthy of more honor, love, and respect? (see note).
5. John 5:19-20: How did God's Son relate to the Father? How did God the Father relate to Jesus? Why must we honor Jesus Christ?
6. Ephesians 6:1: What is right for children to do?
7. Ephesians 6:2-3: What is the command? What is the promise?
8. Ephesians 6:4: What are the limits of a father's authority?

Chapter Summary



We should love, honor, respect, and — when we are children — obey our parents. Parents train us to love, honor, and obey God.

Only Jesus is the perfect Son who honored and obeyed God his Father.

Dynamic Relationships

Dynamic



Relationships

How important is your work?

The Bible contains a challenging but simple statement: *If a man will not work, he shall not eat.* This is an accurate observation about your life. You must work to “make a living.” You earn money to provide for yourself and for your family. If you do not have a job, your future may be poverty and hunger. But is there more to work than making a living?

We spend most of our daytime hours relating to our jobs and our employers. Why is your work important - in addition to your need to earn money?

- In Confucianism, a relationship with your boss is not one of the five principal relationships: 1) ruler-subject, 2) father-son, 3) older brother-younger brother, 4) husband-wife, 5) friend-friend. Is work important for a good society?
- In Marxism, workers lose control of their lives by losing control of their work. Workers are alienated from what they make, from the production process, and from other workers. Workers become replaceable parts in a big machine.

The Bible teaches that people are more than *workers*. People are *worshippers*. But *what* do you worship? Do you serve the God who made you? Or, do you serve the things you make? Humans were made in God’s image, to reflect God’s glory. Your work does not define or determine what you are worth. The quality of your work can reflect the value, beauty, honor, and creativity of God.

What are your priorities?

Genesis 2:15 says, *the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* God gives us our work - to care of the world and to develop the world’s potential.



You can honor and serve God with *any* form of honest, good, excellent work. Engineers, teachers, farmers, craftsmen, housewives, artists, attorneys, builders, medical workers - all can serve God by *working* and *taking care* of the world.

In some cultures, including the West, people have a wrong idea: that you can only serve God as a full time priest, a minister, or a monk. This divides our lives into two categories: the sacred and secular.

The Wrong Way to Look at Life

Sacred
spiritual work
you do for God

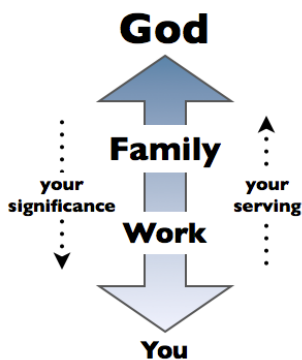


Secular
material work
you do in the world

sacred: spiritual or religious.

secular: worldly, not spiritual or religious.

holy: people or activities that are dedicated to God.



But the Bible teaches that *all* honest work can be holy. You can serve and reflect God’s honor in your every day work - and not only in your “religious work.”

This diagram shows the right relationship and priorities. God gives you family, your work, your life and talents. God gives significance and value to all things in your life. We will serve God when we do our work with diligence and support our family through earning and investing. We don’t just serve God part-time or in our “free time.”

not work - not eat: this Bible verse is from 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Some at Thessalonica (in modern Greece) thought that Christians did not need to work.

alienated: Marx used this term to describe how workers lose a vital connection to their work - unlike a farmer or a shoe-maker who enjoys a direct connection to their work.

Notes:

I know: Israel's wise king Solomon wrote this Bible book containing his observations about life.

satisfaction: to have pleasure, to find enjoyment or fulfillment.

toil: hard work, work that requires great effort.

endure forever: to continue always, not decay or end.

slaves: In the Roman and other ancient empires, people captured in military battles were made slaves. The Bible does not approve slavery. But notice how the message of Christ transforms even hard relationships.

earthly masters: masters or bosses here on earth.

revere, reverence: to honor with great respect, worship.

favoritism: to treat one person better than another.

Master in heaven - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Week 8: Employment relationships Dynamic Relationships

Our talents and our work are good gifts from God. We must not let these gifts become our false "gods." We do not work to serve ourselves. And we must not become a slave to work. Our work should serve and honor God.

From the Bible



Ecclesiastes 3:12—14: ¹² I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and [to] do good while they live. ¹³ That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all [your] toil — this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to [God's work] and nothing [can be] taken from [God's work]. God does it [God's work] so that men will revere him [God].

1 Corinthians 10:31: ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, [do everything] for the glory of God.

Colossians 3:22—4:1: ^{3:22} Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do [your work], not only when [your master's] eye is on you and to win [your master's] favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. ^{4:1} Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Discuss



1. Ecclesiastes 3:12: During your life time on earth, *there is nothing better* than for you to be ____ and to do ____.
2. Ecclesiastes 3:13: Our work can often become toil. While you work hard, what three things should you think of as God's gift? That you may ____, and ____, and find ____.
3. Ecclesiastes 3:14: Our work can reflect God's work. But how is God's work different than human work? How should we respond?
4. 1 Corinthians 10:31: What should be your highest goal in life? Is there any activity in life that should *not* work toward this goal?
5. Colossians 3:22: This describes the most difficult work relationship - between a master and a slave. Did you ever feel like a slave to your work? Why?
6. Colossians 3:22: Why should you always work hard - even when your boss is not watching you? What is a higher goal than winning favor ("face" or recognition) from your boss?
7. Colossians 3:23: For whom should Christians work?
8. Colossians 3:24-25: What motivates a Christian to do good work? What warns Christians not to do bad work?
9. Colossians 4:1: How should a Christian master (or boss) treat an employee? Why?

Chapter Summary

Your work can reflect God's work. Your work can serve other people, provide for yourself and your family, and honor God.



Dynamic Relationships



The world of nations

The LORD made all nations. And God will be worshiped throughout the whole earth. *All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord ...* (Psalm 86:9)

We come from different nations. We should be loyal to our homelands - voting, paying taxes, and honoring our rulers. But the first Christians were called disloyal to Rome's empire. Why were Jesus' followers considered a political problem?

The Bible says that Christians have "dual citizenship." They are citizens of God's kingdom, but also citizens of their home nations. Christians must live as "foreigners in the world." Local churches are embassies of God's kingdom. Christians should live as God's people in the world - to bring God's blessings to all the nations. Christians do not depend on the favor of any government.

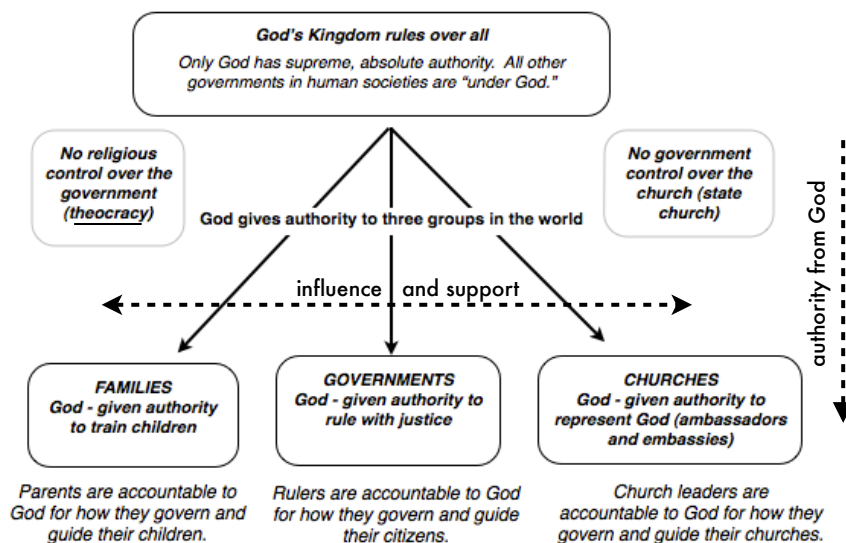
The danger of "nationalism"

The Bible teaches that only God rules with absolute control and total power. If we think that our nation is better or more powerful than some other nation, we may take advantage of other people. When rulers claim total, absolute power over their citizens, their governments become corrupt and dangerous.

Nations are important. Loyalty to your nation is important. But your loyalty to your nation and to your government must not become your ultimate loyalty.

God's Kingdom is over all

The Bible says, *The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and [God's] kingdom rules over all.* (Psalm 103:19) All kingdoms, nations, and governments are "under God" - not above God.



This diagram shows that God's kingdom is over all other forms of authority. God gives authority and power to leaders of families, governments, and churches. We should honor our leaders. But only God has ultimate and absolute power.

Notes:

embassies are official missions through which nations conduct foreign affairs. Embassies are staffed by ambassadors. So, Christians are ambassadors of Christ. Churches are embassies of God's kingdom.

ultimate: the most important, essential, or final reality for your life.

theocracy: a human government ruled by religious authority or a nation that claims to be ruled by God.

Notes:

partiality: to treat one kind of person or group more favorably than another person or group. Social discrimination.

Caesar: the Roman Emperor. At this time, the Jewish people were ruled by Rome. Paying taxes to the foreign government was unpopular.

duplicity: They tried to trick Jesus. They acted like they were interested in Jesus' words. But the spies' real purpose was to trap Jesus - and to have Jesus arrested.

denarius: Roman coin.

portrait: The coin had the image and title of the Roman Emperor. The wisdom of Jesus' words is based on the fact that humans are made in *God's image* (Genesis 1:27).

citizenship: the place or location where you have the right to be a citizen. Your state or nationality. Christians have a PASSPORT from heaven, but a VISA to live on earth.

allegiance: loyalty to a nation, ruler, or cause. For example, citizens "pledge allegiance" to their home country.

Week 9: Relating to Governments Dynamic Relationships

These Bible sections teach about our responsibilities as citizens, and also about the limits of political and government power. The Bible teaches followers of Jesus about their ultimate and most important loyalty.

From the Bible



Luke 20:20-26: ²⁰ [The local rulers] sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand [Jesus] over to the power and authority of the governor.

²¹ So the spies questioned [Jesus]: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. ²² Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

²³ [Jesus] saw through their duplicity and said to them, ²⁴ "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" ²⁵ "Caesar's," they replied. [Jesus] said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and [give] to God what is God's."

Romans 13:1-2,6-7: ¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, [the citizen] who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves ... ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Philippians 3:19-20: ¹⁹ [For people who do not know God] their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...

Discuss



1. Luke 20:20-21: How did the spies try to trap Jesus? What did the local rulers want to do with Jesus?
2. Luke 20:22: What trick question did the spies ask Jesus? Why would Jesus be trapped, if Jesus answered them, "Yes," or "No"?
3. Luke 20:23-25: How did Jesus answer? What do we owe to Caesar? What should we give to God? (see the note on portrait)
4. Romans 13:1: What is the source of human authority and government?
5. Romans 13:2: What will happen if we disobey the authorities?
6. Romans 13:6-7: What things do we owe to our governments?
7. Philippians 3:19: Describe people who do not know or serve God. What is their "destiny" (goal)? Their "god" (what controls their life)? Their "glory" (reputation, honor)? Their "mind" (their focus in life)?
8. Philippians 3:20: What is the ultimate allegiance for a Christian?

Chapter Summary



God has given authority for all rule and government in the world.
But human authority is limited. Only God has absolute power.

Dynamic Relationships

Dynamic



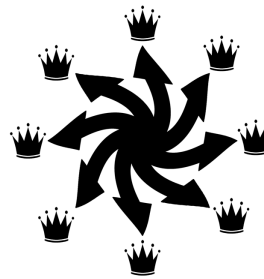
Relationships

Build your own kingdom → become enemies.

An idol is anything that replaces the true God in your life. According to the Bible, *all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens*. When people worship rival gods or serve themselves, there is no peace in the world. Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky noted that all people must “bow down to something.” Who do you serve as king?

The Bible book of *Genesis* tells how people became divided into rival nations. In ancient Babylon, people built a city to centralize power, to control their lives, and to promote their own reputations. The project was based on false worship.

The whole world had one language and a common speech. [All the people] said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” ... But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building ... the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city ... there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. (Genesis 11:1-9)



Notice the reason for building a city: to *make a name for ourselves and not be scattered*. When we build our own kingdoms and promote our own reputations, that causes confusion, division, and hostility between people and nations.

Seek the LORD’s Kingdom → become friends.

The Bible says that seeking our own control, power, and glory is the reason for all the chaos, confusion, and conflict in the world. How can there be harmony when people seek their own kingdoms?



History repeats the pattern of distrust and hostility between peoples, cultures, languages, and nations. Every nation tries to control its destiny. Governments do not want to lose influence over other nations. Leaders do not want to lose face or reputation in front of other leaders. Empires rise and fall. Nations gain or lose military and economic power. Think of some empires that conquered other nations: Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Rome, Greece, Germany, Japan. Where are all of these great powers now?



The Bible describes how world-wide divisions began. The Bible also describes how world history will end. God’s kingdom will be the only kingdom. *O LORD ... the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, “Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good.* (Jeremiah 16:19) At the end, people from every nation will serve the LORD as King. But how will this world-wide harmony be achieved?

Notes:

idol: a false god that is not the true, living God.

rival: competitor for your loyalty.

bow down: to show loyalty or worship.

Babylon: the city of Babel in the Bible, and the land of Babylon were in the area of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, modern day Iraq.

hostility: hatred of your enemy, enmity.

destiny: your future.

Notes:

Ephesians: this is a letter from Paul, an ambassador of Christ, to Christians in the city of Ephesus (modern Turkey)

excluded: to be a stranger, a foreigner, or an illegal alien.

covenants of the promise: in the Bible, God's promise is to save and restore the world to his kingdom. Through covenants, God obligated himself to achieve the world's salvation and peace.

blood of Christ: refers to Jesus Christ's death on a cross, to pay the penalty for our dishonoring God.

barrier: a fence or wall that keeps people from coming together - like cultural or legal differences.

reconcile: to restore a relationship, to turn enemies into friends.

hostility: hatred toward your enemy.

preached: to proclaim good news (gospel) of peace with God and with other people - through Jesus Christ.

access: permission or freedom to approach.

Week 10: Hope for International Relations Dynamic Relationships

Through all of history, no one has been able to achieve world-wide peace. Is anyone willing to give up their personal power and control? Has anyone sacrificed their personal reputation - so all nations can come together? There has been only one person in history willing to make that sacrifice!

From the Bible



Ephesians 2: ¹² Remember ... you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For [Christ] is our peace, [Christ] has ... destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility [between people] ¹⁵ ... [Christ's] purpose was to create ... one new [humanity] ... making peace, ¹⁶ ... to reconcile ... them to God through the cross, by which [Christ] put to death their hostility.

¹⁷ [Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through [Christ] we both have access to [God] the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but [you are] fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household ...

Discuss



1. As an international student or scholar, what are some ways that you feel like an outsider or "separate"?
2. As a foreigner, from what things are you excluded - that American students and native-born scholars can easily and legally do?
3. Verse 12: What must we all remember?
4. Verse 12: When you are a foreigner to God's promise and people, what must you live "without" in this world?
5. Verse 13: What brings people near to God - and to each other?
6. Verse 14 says that Christ makes peace by destroying something. What did Christ destroy?
7. Verse 15: What was Christ's purpose?
8. Verse 16: What does it mean to reconcile people? (see note)
9. Verse 16: When Christ died on a cross, what did Christ put to death?
10. Do you think of yourself as someone "near" or "far away"?
11. Verse 17: What does Christ offer to all people, both near and far?
12. Verses 18-19: List the benefits that Christ provides for people.

Chapter Summary



Jesus is the only person who can bring people from all the nations together. Jesus was the only person ready to give up power, glory, control, riches, and honor - to reconcile us to God. Jesus was willing to die with shame on a cross so that we can be honored. Jesus became an alien in this world, so that we can become fellow citizens in God's kingdom.

Dynamic Relationships

Notes:

Dynamic



Relationships

The Problem with the World

The Bible teaches that God has made us for relationships. We do not want to be alone or lonely. Nothing can give us more joy than good relationships with our friends or with someone we love. Healthy relationships with employers and with fellow workers make our lives more productive. But nothing gives us more pain than broken relationships.

Our hearts hunger for healthy relationships. We are hurt by bad relationships. We aim for respect, honor, and harmony between our friends, employers, teachers, and in international relations. But we always fall short of our goal. What is the problem? Why is it difficult for people to have good relationships?

The Bible says the most basic human problem is **sin**. Because this term is not always understood, here is a short summary of the Bible's teaching about sin:

- Sin is an **unpaid debt**. If you borrow from someone, you are obligated and owe them for what they loan you. God gives us life and our abilities. But we do not honor God or show our gratitude for God's goodness.
- Sin is **self-centered**. We were designed to honor and to please God. Because of sin, we seek our own honor or pleasure. We should serve God. Sin leads to selfishness. We serve ourselves and seek our own pleasure.
- Sin is **idolatry**. We should worship the one, true, living God who made us. Because of sin, we look to finite things - a job, a person, or a possession - to give us our meaning and fulfillment. Finite things substitute for God.
- Sin is **rebellion**. If you dishonor your ruler or disobey your nation's laws, you rebel against authority. Sin makes us rebels against God's rule, God's laws, and God's kingdom. We try to build our own kingdoms.
- Sin is **slavery**. You become a slave to people or things that control you. Like an addiction, sin will make you depend on what is harmful to you. Your controlling desires can become slave-masters that rule over you.
- Sin is a **disease** that leads to death. Sin spreads like cancer. Sin is like a disease for which there is no human cure. Only God can heal sin.

idolatry: to worship or to serve something finite and material - a false god - not the true and living God.

addiction: controlling need for something that is habit-forming. To become a slave or to become controlled by something that you *must* have.

Sin causes separation

- **Separation from God**. Because sin is rebellion against God, sin separates us from life with God. If God does not save us, death will bring permanent separation from God. Humans are both physical and spiritual. When we die, our spirits leave our bodies. But sin also separates our spirits from everlasting life with God in heaven.
- **Separated from other people**. Because sin is self-centered, we do not honor, respect, or love other people as we should. Sin kills relationships.
- **Separation from yourself**. Sin can cause psychological problems. When we become slaves to our bad behaviors, we will harm ourselves.



Notes:

quarrels: to argue or to struggle with someone.

desires: passions or delight for pleasure.

covet: to intensely want what belongs to another person; to jealously desire something that is not yours.

adulterous: unfaithful in your love for God. To love the world instead of loving God.

Scripture: the Bible, God's written Word.

envies intensely: God gave us spirits. God intensely and strongly desires our spiritual love - that we should love God more than loving the world.

grace: God's love and favor for those who turn from sin to God.

submit: to obey.

devil: the evil one and original source of sin.

flee: to run away.

slander: to speak evil about another person.

Week 11: What Breaks Relationships? Dynamic Relationships

According to the Bible, sin destroys your relationship with God, breaks your relationships with other people, and brings harm to your own life.

From the Bible



James 4: ¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit [God] caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁶ But [God] gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and [the devil] will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and [God] will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded ... ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the LORD, and [God] will lift you up.

¹¹ Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Discuss



1. James 4:1: What causes fights and quarrels?
2. James 4:2: Why don't we get things we desire, covet?
3. James 4:3: Why doesn't God always answer prayers like we want?
4. James 4:4: How do people become adulterous? What competes with a person's love for God?
5. James 4:5-6: What does God intensely desire for you? [see note] What kind of person receives, or does not receive, God's grace?
6. James 4:7-8: Who should you submit your life to?
7. James 4:8,10: Who does God come near? Who will God lift up?
8. James 4:11: Why is it wrong to slander or to call someone evil?
9. James 4:12: Who is the only Lawgiver, Judge, and Savior?

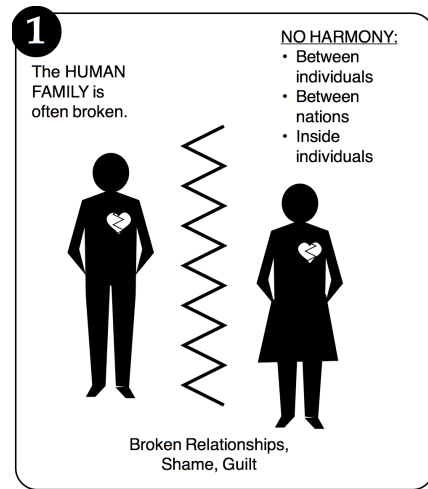
Chapter Summary



Sin breaks our relationships with God and also with other people. What happens when we try to get our own way, desiring what does not belong to us, and try to take God's place? Sin makes us struggle, fight, and judge other people as evil. We separate ourselves from God's love. And we destroy our relationships with people who could be our friends.

Katie Rawson, PhD, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, explains the Bible's message, based on relationships. The following diagrams show how God restores relationships through Jesus Christ.

Broken Relationships



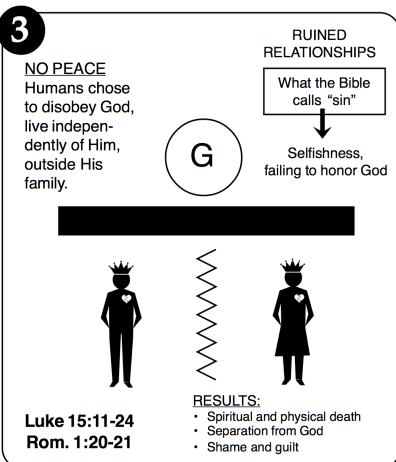
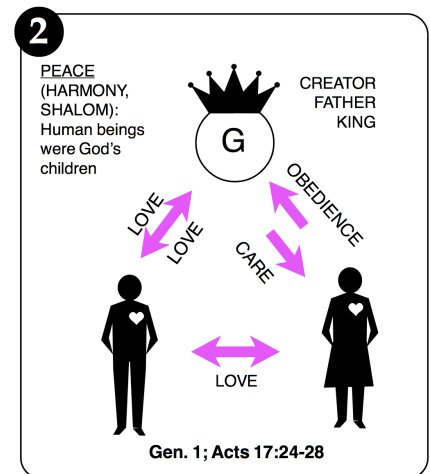
Think of your relationships. You have classmates and fellow workers. You may have a brother, or a sister, and parents. You have best friends. You may have a boy friend or a special girl friend. We want to have harmony and health in our relationships. But our world is filled with broken relationships. And broken relationships can produce great pain.

A break in a very close or important relationship will bring the most pain. When a classmate criticizes you, you may have bad feelings. But, when you are dating someone, and that person breaks your relationship, it is even more painful. What if your husband, wife, or parent rejects you? That really breaks your heart. You will become broken inside.

The Bible teaches that God created us all. God made us for peace and harmony in relationships. If we relate to God as our Father in heaven, we are God's children. If we obey the King of heaven, we will enjoy God's love and receive God's care. When we live in a right relationship with God as our heavenly Father, we can enjoy healthy and loving relationships with each other. These relationships are connected.

Notice, in the diagram on the right, the king's crown belongs to God. God's kingdom should be honored in our world, because God's kingdom is supreme in heaven. Do we respect God's rule, and respond to God's love and care for us? Then we will show love and respect for each other. But there is the problem: all people have turned away from God's love and rule. We live like we are kings.

Notice, in the diagram below, the crown is no longer with God. When we try to selfishly rule our own lives, then all our relationships will break - between people and nations.

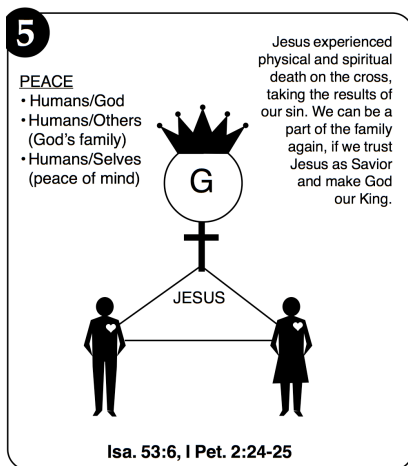
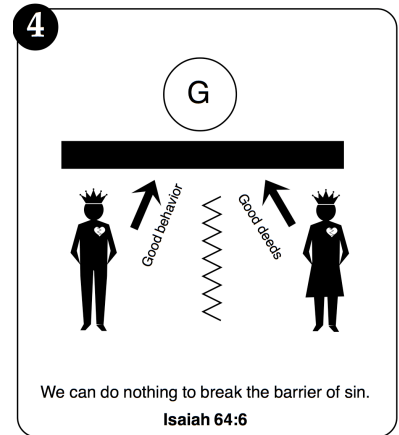


The Bible word "sin" describes rebelling against God, the true King and perfect Father in heaven. Sin means that we turn away from God, to rule our own lives, and to seek our own way. Sin does not mean "crime." Sin is an attitude of the human heart. Sin is the attitude that says, "I want to live my life independent from God. I want to control my own life. I want to be my own god and king." If we dishonor our relationship with God, then we have broken the most important relationship! As a result, we experience both physical and spiritual death, which means separation from God. We build walls between each other. We experience shame, a loss of face, and we also experience guilt.

God Restores Relationships

We can try to break down the wall between God and us. We can try to do good works, to act more religious, or study philosophies. But God is 100% pure. We are never 100% pure. For the wall of sin to be removed, God must break through - from the top down (from heaven down to us on earth). We never climb up into God's kingdom. God's kingdom must break through the wall. God must come down to earth from heaven.

And God did come down to earth, to break through the wall of sin, the barrier to a relationship with God. God's Son came from heaven, to bring God's kingdom to us.



Notice, in the diagram on the left, that the crown belongs to God. Jesus Christ came for us, to restore peace and harmony with God. Jesus lived in a perfect relationship with God. Jesus honored God as his Father. Jesus lived a perfectly obedient human life - the kind of life that we should live for God. Jesus Christ always obeyed and honored God.

God's Son died on the cross suffer separation from God the Father in our place. Jesus did not deserve this pain and death. Jesus experienced the ultimate, most painful broken relationship. Jesus died in our place, to open a way for us to go to his home in heaven. Jesus was rejected by God, so that we can be accepted by God. We can be restored to God's family if we trust in Christ.

What can we do? Only God can restore our broken relationship. We cannot make ourselves right with God. Our best efforts never earn us acceptance or a secure place in God's family. But Jesus Christ did everything that we need. When we believe and trust in Jesus, we are restored to harmony and peace with God. So, we must accept God's gift - the gift God provided for us. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live and die for us.

A PRAYER IF YOU WANT TO SEEK GOD: "God, I want to know the truth about You. Please reveal Yourself to me. God, if You will reveal Yourself to me, then I will make You the LORD and Master of my life."

A PRAYER IF YOU WANT TO BECOME PART OF GOD'S FAMILY: "Father God, I have tried to live my life in independence from You. But now, I want to come home to You. Thank you for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the way I have dishonored You. Please come into my life and take control. Help me to obey You in all of my life. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank You!"

