

more to be RELATIONSHIPS

five key truths about relationships

We all desire healthy, meaningful, satisfying relationships with others.

We ultimately want to get along with friends, without all the drama. *We want to feel loved by a special someone -- a best friend now, a boyfriend at some point, hopefully a husband one day, and even through having children. We want to know that we are unconditionally loved by our parents and siblings, even when we experience a less than perfect life. We want to feel connected to others, as somehow that connection influences our sense of worth and creates a place for us to belong.*

Our longings for authentic and meaningful relationships are normal because that is the way we were designed. God made us to be loved, by Him and others, and to be connected in life giving relationships. The problems we face in our relationships are both a result of sin and unrealistic expectations of others, or of God. Our culture has perpetuated the idea that we need others to validate our lives and define our worth. On the contrary!

Our worth is defined by who we are in Christ, and our relationships are designed to glorify God through how we serve one another.

If we've fallen into a pattern of defining our lives by our relationships, we'll find ourselves truly disappointed and frustrated. A boyfriend cannot be a public stamp of approval, indicating, "I am loved." A spouse ought not to be a security blanket. Parents cannot become a means to an end. Relationships cannot be about making us happy, validated, or feeling valued. This is not at all what God intended.

*Genesis 1:26 NLT
Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."*

God designed us for a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, and from the overflow of that relationship, we are made to pour out His love on others (Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:3).

*1 Thessalonians 3:12 NLT
And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows*

TRUTH #1

crave

We crave relationships because we're made by a relational God and are wired for deep, unconditional love.

Ephesians 1:3-14 MSG - Long before [God] laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

From the very beginning of creation, God made us to be in relationships -- with Him, first and foremost, and with others. Even so, the word relationship can't even be found in the original Hebrew or Greek Scriptures. Only in modern translations, such as the Message, can you search for the word relationship and find a handful of key verses to meditate upon.

What you do find, however, as you look at the Scriptures, are references to the essence of relationships built on loving, serving, worshipping, praying, and working together. This is reflected first and foremost in the God-head. In Genesis 1:26, the Creator refers to himself in the plural: us. This "us" refers to what Christians call the Trinity, made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although not stated in the Scriptures as the Trinity, the reference is found in the Schema (Deuteronomy 6:4), where God is referred to as One, and later in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 3:14), where He is named in three parts. Each part of the God-head fulfills a different purpose, but they are designed to work together, in relationship!

1. **God the Father** is the Creator of the universe and Father of all humankind.
2. **Jesus**, present in the God-head before He ever walked this earth, is our Redeemer and Savior. As fully God and fully man, Jesus was sent by God to save His people from their sin.

3. The **Holy Spirit** is the third part of the Trinity. When Jesus departed this earth, He did not leave us alone, but gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit as our counselor and guide. The Holy Spirit dwells within each believer, imparting knowledge of the Word to lead us in life and faith actions.

If we studied the Trinity closely throughout the Scriptures, we would find such beauty in the roles each part plays for the purpose of the whole. In the same way, we can look at humankind and see a similar pattern of need, purpose, and design. It is no wonder we long for connection built on sincere love. God created us this way!

TRUTH #2

created

We were created to be in a personal, intimate relationship with God, first and foremost, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

1 John 4:3-16 MSG - This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

Genesis 1:26 NLT - Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us."

Genesis 2:18 NIV - The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Within the God-head there is an inherent three-way relationship, but the design for relationships doesn't begin and end there.

God longs to connect with His people, but this is only possible through faith in His son, Jesus Christ.

Yes, there is only one way to have an intimate relationship with God the Father, and that is through faith in the Savior (Romans 10:9-10). This relationship

*Ephesians 1:3-14 MSG
Long before [God] laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.*

cannot come through another human being, such as a pastor or priest. It must come through faith in Christ alone by confessing with your mouth the Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that He saves you from your sin.

Simply put, we need a Savior. We're a messy people marked by our flesh-driven sin. We disobey God naturally, and could never meet His holy standard within our own efforts. God is absolutely perfect, holy, and unmarked by sin, and can only be in relationship with a holy people. This is why He provided the one and only perfect sacrifice, His Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf so that we may approach Him as we are and be intimately connected in a right relationship with God.

When Christ died on the cross, He became the covering over us. God sees us through His Son. We don't have to become perfect and blameless in order to be able to approach God. We are already acceptable to Him, because Jesus fills the gap with His perfect, holy grace. Yet because of our love for our Father, we must live putting off sin and not indulging it. Jesus isn't our free-for-all ticket to disobedience. There are consequences for our sin, including separation from God and His discipline. But there is also His grace and mercy, received through forgiveness, that sets us on a new path and in a redeemed relationship with God as well as others.

TRUTH #3

community

We were made to live in life-giving relationships with others for our mutual benefit and God's glory.

Romans 12:5-10 MSG - In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. **Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body.** But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be...

Ephesians 4:1-5 - As a prisoner of the Lord, I beg you to live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own. Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other. Try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace. All of you are part of the same body. There is only one Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people.

Accepting Christ as Lord is key to experiencing transformed relationships. When Jesus dwells within our heart and soul, our desperate need to be loved on a human level becomes less vital. That's not to say we should live without human relationships. On the contrary, by God's design, we do need one another.

We are called to live as the hands and feet of Christ. Every human being should be physically and practically loved by another, because God first loved us through Jesus.

When God fills us with His love, we cannot help but overflow His love onto others. When we fall into stride with this pattern of having our needs met by God first, our expectations of others shifts dramatically and what we offer them in return comes into a realistic perspective. The burden to fix and solve others' problems, which is a great strain on relationships, is lessened while our ability to give from the overflow in our life becomes possible. This truth applies in all of the relationships we may experience in our lifetime (Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:3).

1. Relationship Between Husband and Wife

God's design for relationships isn't limited to being connected with Him. He's also passionate about us being in a relationship male to female. Likely, you can testify to this as you experience a strong desire to be in a relationship with a guy, even long before you are of the marrying age. This desire is good! It is the way God made you, even if the timing to act on those feelings has not yet arrived.

Right from the beginning, God not only made man, He also made woman. In Genesis, the Word reveals that even with all the animals and an incredible opportunity to walk with God, Himself, the Lord did not find a suitable match for man. So He made woman. Out of Adam came Eve, not to replace him, boss him, or cater to him. The Creator of the Universe designed man and woman, together to make a complete whole. One for the

other. Together, two were much better than one. (Genesis 2:18, 21-24)

The New Testament teachings reflect this design in the union of marriage where a man and woman have ultimate intimacy, both physically, emotionally, and spiritually, under the headship of Christ.

Ephesians 5:29-33 MSG - And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh." This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

A marriage isn't only made up of a husband and wife. In a Christian marriage, the relationship comes under the headship of Christ. In that regard, a marriage is a chord of three strands, stronger because of the individual relationships with Christ. While a marriage can exist apart from Christ, two believers coming together in a marriage is how God designed it to exist.

It is critically important to mention that in God's eyes, according to Scripture, a marriage is not between two people of the same gender. There are no examples in Scripture of this type of relationship meeting the qualifications of marriage or as God's design. I know, personally, that this is a difficult, tender, and challenging matter to understand. If you disagree with me, you're not alone. However, there are a few key references that describe a same-sex relationship as sinful (Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) in much of the same way that committing adultery, theft, greed, and idolatry are also sin. The reality is that we are all tempted with some type of sin, and often daily! Will some people struggle with same-sex attraction? Yes! Absolutely! Is it wrong to have feelings toward sinful behavior? No. But is it a

bad decision to act on those temptations which the Bible tells us to turn from? Yes. We can all agree that we struggle with sin -- the desire to do things that are against God's design and considered disobedience. But just

Romans 12:5-10 MSG

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

because it is hard, doesn't mean we should make it acceptable.

2. Relationships Between Parents, Children, and Siblings

As you read along in Genesis, you'll see that God not only brought Adam a helper, Eve, but that He specifically called them to be fruitful and multiply. He saw this human relationship as something good, and deemed it a worthy pursuit to create more little humans frolicking around Adam and Eve's legs (Genesis 1:28).

The family unit is critical to God's design, and is supposed to be a source of relational satisfaction. But in the same way sin has tarnished the marital relationship, it has also left its mark on the family unit. We see this in terms of divorce, abuse, and betrayal in so many family units. Only God's love, grace, and forgiveness can bring about true healing and the ability to move forward in emotional and spiritual health after the effects of sin have left its mark on your family.

3. Relationships within the Family of God

Not only did God create relationships within a marriage and family to be beneficial to the individual, He also designed the family of God, at large, to come together under the headship of Christ, all working together for the common good and His glory. The New Testament description of the body of Christ describes each person as an important, critical part not meant to stand alone. Together, each member is intended to bring their gifts, talents, personality, and perspective to be used for the mutual good of the family of God (Romans 12:5-10). The reason we don't see this happening in the family of God is a result of sin, once again. The enemy of God worms his way into our relationships, bringing havoc on the body of Christ through petty conflict and deeply painful experiences. No matter what, however, we are called to live in peace together, if at all possible, and strive for unity. This means we daily need to walk humbly and acknowledge the forgiveness that is made ours through Christ, so that offenses do not fester into infected wounds and grow into a root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:14).

4. Relationships with non-Christians

No matter where we stand in

*Hebrews 12:14
[Warning Against
Refusing God] Make
every effort to live in
peace with all men
and to be holy.*

*Colossians 3:13
Bear with each
other and forgive
whatever
grievances you
may have
against one
another. Forgive
as the Lord
forgave you*

our faith, whether a new believer or a seasoned Christian, we will find ourselves in relationships with people who don't share our beliefs and might even find them offensive. Regardless of whether these people are family members, friends, or strangers, we are called to be gentle, kind, and humble as well as to seek opportunities to share the love of Christ and the Truth, both through actions and words.

Sometimes meeting a practical need will be a far greater relationship builder than handing them Bible verses to share the Gospel message. Be prayerful, seeking God for the opportunities to do both!

What we give in these relationships should be a reflection of what we have received from Christ. We've been forgiven, so we should forgive. We've been extended grace, so we should also extend grace. This is true for all our relationships.

However, in relationships with non-Christians, our expectations and needs must radically shift from how we engage with Christians. We cannot expect a Christ-like response from them, because they have not personally experienced Christ. Nor should we pursue a deep connection because their counsel, support, and encouragement would likely be inconsistent with Scripture. While the relationship can be very meaningful, both ways, we need to keep in mind the warning in Scripture to not be yoked, or bonded, together with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-15 NIV/NLT).

TRUTH #4

challenges

We will face challenges in our relationships because of sin, but in Christ, we can find the path of redemption and restoration.

Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Hebrews 12:14 - Make every effort to live in peace with all [people] and to be holy.

If God is so into relationships, why is everything so messed up?

Why is every man not married to a woman?

Why is our culture convinced that gay relationships are acceptable?

Why is there infertility?

Why do parents walk out on their families?

Why do dads and moms hurt their kids?

Why is there such division and hurt within the church?

Because of sin.

Eve was deceived by the Serpent, and Adam followed suit. Together, they broke God's command to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and in doing so, sin was introduced into this world (Genesis 2 and 3).

Yet, if you're like me, this still doesn't make sense.

Why didn't God make a world without sin?

I don't know.

But God is still God. He is still on the throne in the face of sin and pain and hurts and disappointments.

And in His mercy He provided Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life, where there is no sin, nor tears, no pain, nor death (Revelation 21:4).

I often think that God could have done it differently, but what would be the outcome then?

He could have made us to never sin, but where would that leave us? Would we be robots programmed to love and obey? Sure, God could have designed us to worship and adore Him, walking in His ways all the days of our life.

But would you like being told who you must love?

Would you like me requiring someone to love you?

Oh, no!

The preciousness of love is that it is not required, but can be freely given.

But love is messy because it has been tarnished by sin. Regardless of what you think God should have done, we live in a fallen world, where the desires of the flesh often trump the intentions of the heart.

You've been hurt by those who ought to have protected and cared for you. People will fail you. Words will be carelessly misspoken. Accidents will happen. Betrayal will likely mark your life at some point. Trust will be broken.

Yet this doesn't keep us from longing for satisfying earthly relationships where we are loved, appreciated, cared for,

remembered, acknowledged, and received. In some cases, we will experience these gifts, but often only when both people in the relationship are striving to live consistently with the Scriptures. Yet this doesn't preclude challenges and offenses. What it does mean is that reconciliation is possible through humility and forgiveness.

The challenges we face in our sin-affected relationships has much to do with our unrealistic expectations. We turn to fallen human beings to love us with God-sized ability. Instead, we need to turn to God for His fulfilling love, and turn to others in grace receiving whatever they have to offer.

Is this hard to do? Yes! It takes time and maturity, often, to recognize God's tangible love and to feel His presence in our lives. This experience of His love often comes through a shift in perspective, drawn from a willingness to live according to the Word rather than emotions or feelings. It is really a matter of focus, setting your mind and heart on the things of God and His principles, while releasing your family, friends, and others from filling the God-sized hole in your heart.

TRUTH #5

correct

We can improve our relationships by correcting our thinking as we implement boundaries and apply the instructions found in the Word.

Romans 12:2 NLT - Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

Colossians 3:13 - Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

We established the fact that we crave relationships, because that is how we were designed. We've also acknowledged that God's perfect design has been marred by sin. So where does that leave us in terms of navigating through all the relationships we will have in our lifetime?

1. Consider Your Reality

Healthy relationships are grown through healthy

*Galatians 6:1-3 MSG
[Nothing but the Cross]
Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.*

thinking, because our thoughts determine how we feel and how we feel determines how we act and respond. Therefore, the first step in moving forward is to take an inventory, of sorts, looking at the type of relationships you have in your life and assessing where they stand in terms of emotional and spiritual health.

- Consider how you interact with your family and friends, and evaluate if they are marked by signs of love, respect, consideration, honor. Or do you see signs of mistrust, disrespect, unforgiveness, betrayal?
- Also look at your own heart. Consider what you are looking for in terms of friendship and family commitment. Ask yourself if you are seeking to have your emotional needs met in an unhealthy way?

Once you get a sense of what your relationships look like, and what needs you are longing to have met, seek out the Lord in prayer, giving it all to Him. You might also need to take a bold step in trusting a godly mentor with your struggles or even make an appointment to talk with a Christian counselor. Relationship issues are tough and multi-layered, and often require the help of a trustworthy adult or professional to move forward.

2. Implement Boundaries

Proverbs 4:23 teaches that we must guard our heart for it is the well spring of our life. This means we not only need to be aware of the reality of our relationships and emotional/spiritual needs, but we need to put boundaries in place to protect our hearts from unnecessary pain. It is not wrong to put some physical space and time limitations in place for relationships that are a negative influence on you, especially if these relationships exist outside your family unit. In the same way a fence marks off a piece of property and a lock on a front door prevents intruders, your life -- spiritual, emotional, and physical -- needs to have clear boundaries in place for your own protection.

3. Apply the Word

Ultimately, our relationships will change if our thinking about how to engage with others comes from the instructions found in Scripture. The Word is loaded with practical directions on how to cultivate healthy relationships. The letters written by Paul to the churches (Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and

Philippians) are steeped in practical application, for he was speaking to a body of Christ facing the challenge of living in community together. He urges the believers to be forgiving, compassionate, and patient with one another. James is also a great portion of Scripture filled with insights on how to press on together in a trial, manage anger, and listen attentively.

Relationships are hard but they are also worth the effort.

God designed us one for another, and most importantly to be in a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus.

By getting right with God first, and lining up your thinking with His truth, you'll have the ability to navigate relationships with grace and humility. When your relationship with the Lord is in a healthy place, your relationships within your family as well as with friends, and even strangers, will have a whole new purpose, potential, and perspective. Challenges will come, but with correct thinking, you'll be able to solve issues with a measure of peace and grace. And most importantly, in Christ, you'll be able to walk the path of forgiveness, because you have been forgiven.

Relationships are worth it. Put in the time and energy to learn how to do it God's way. You'll not be disappointed, especially as you see Him transform your life from the inside out.

STUDY MORE

So what does the Word say about living in healthy relationships with others, especially the Lord? Look up these verses, in context for further study.

Gen 1:26, 28 NLT

Mat 28:19

Rom 3:21-26 CEV

Gen 2:18, 21-24 NLT

Rom 12:5-10 MSG

1 Cor 13 MSG

2 Cor 12:15-16 NIV/NLT

2 Cor 10:3-5 NIV

Joh 7:38

1 The 3:3

Deu 6:4

Eph 1:3-14 MSG

Eph 5:5-33 NLT

Jam 1:19-25

Mat 22:37-39 CEV

Eph 4:31-32 MSG

Col 3

Mic 6:8

Phil.1:9